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# WHY WE WENT TO WAR

BY

NEWTON D. BAKER

SECRETARY OF WAR, 1916-1921

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## PREFATORY NOTE

Mr. Baker became Secretary of War in President Wilson's cabinet just a year before the United States declared war on Germany, and he served in that capacity until the end of the Wilson Administration in the spring of 1921. At the request of *Foreign Affairs* he some time ago set himself to describe the course of events which led eventually to the declaration of war, consulting for that purpose his own recollections and the mass of documentary and other material which had accumulated in the intervening years. When the results of his investigation were published in *Foreign Affairs* they attracted an extraordinary amount of attention. Evidently in this case "the people" are not what Hegel described them as ordinarily being—"that part of the nation that does not exactly know what it wants." They wanted to know Mr. Baker's opinion as to the causes of America's entry into the World War; and they wanted to know his opinion of the various methods being suggested for avoiding a similar experience in the future. To satisfy their demand, Mr. Baker's study is here reproduced in book form, together with an appendix containing President Wilson's war message and three of his other important messages, and a bibliography and an index. In reading these pages one feels that Mr. Baker was attracted not by the idea of speculating on what might have happened if the emotions of individuals and the actions of governments had been different, but with discovering precisely what they were and in relating effect to cause. He was bent upon isolating those events and forces which took the United States

into the war from other events which also occurred and other forces which also were present but which did not directly produce the fateful decision. The Editors of *Foreign Affairs* welcomed the opportunity of printing Mr. Baker's study in the pages of their review, and are glad that now it is to have further circulation in compact and permanent form.

HAMILTON FISH ARMSTRONG

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## CHAPTER I

### THE DECLARATION OF WAR

ON the second day of April, 1917, President Wilson addressed to the Congress, called in extraordinary session, what has come to be known as his War Message. He advised "that the Congress declare the recent course of the Imperial German Government to be in fact nothing less than war against the Government and people of the United States; that it formally accept the status of belligerent which has thus been thrust upon it; and that it take immediate steps not only to put the country in a more thorough state of defense but also to exert all its power and employ all its resources to bring the Government of the German Empire to terms and end the war."

On April 4 the United States Senate passed the resolution declaring war by a vote of 82 to 6; on April 5 the House of Representatives passed the resolution by a vote of 373 to 50; and on April 6 President Wilson signed the resolution formally declaring the war.

The scene in the hall of the House of Representatives on April 2 when the President read his War Message will not be forgotten by anyone who was present. Every available seat in the gallery was occupied. The diplomatic corps, in official dress,



with the ladies of their households and the more important members of their staffs filled the diplomatic gallery, while all the places usually reserved for officials, and those ordinarily available to the public, were occupied by persons eminent in the official, political and intellectual life of the nation. The floor seated not only the senators and representatives, but was crowded with people specially admitted because of their scholarship in international law or their leadership of public opinion. Members of the Cabinet attended in a body and in a row of seats specially placed immediately in front of the speaker sat the entire membership of the Supreme Court of the United States, headed by the venerable Chief Justice White. In the newspaper gallery were packed the highly trained Washington representatives of the press associations and the great papers, and with them editors, publishers and editorial writers representing every phase of public opinion. As the President proceeded in his address, the tension of suppressed excitement grew until it burst all bounds at the delivery of the sentence quoted above. As the President recommended the declaration of war, applause, which seemed universal, rolled through the whole assembly from floor to gallery. The audience rose to cheer when Chief Justice White waved his hands in the air as he, in effect, led the expression of unanimous approval.

It would have been impossible to have assembled a more complete representation of the statesmanship, intellect, or character of the country, or to have found anywhere people better informed about the European War or America's relationship to it. It is safe to say that nobody in that audience had the least doubt about what was being done or why it was being done. From August 1914, until that hour, practically everybody in that audience had studied constantly the causes and the course of the European conflict. As the contest overseas impinged upon American rights or threatened American interests, the President from time to time delivered messages to Congress or made addresses to the American people, which for clarity and candor, as well as eloquent restraint, are among the most remarkable official publications of our times. As each incident or crisis arose during this period, it was discussed in the newspaper and magazine press, debated in the meetings of learned societies, and became the theme of sermons in every pulpit. Public opinion was never better informed, and while the ultimate causes of the war in Europe were still to be revealed by the publication of foreign office archives, there was no secret about any aspect of America's relations to any of the belligerent countries or of the rights of America, as a neutral, and the injuries inflicted upon those interests by the belligerents.

Immediately after the declaration of war, the newspaper and periodical press editorially reviewed the course of events which had led to American participation. A review of the files of these publications shows that without political or geographical distinction, the country understood and accepted the statement of the case made by the President.

Twenty years later it has become the fashion to suggest that our entry into the war was not in fact for the reasons then stated and generally accepted, but was either the result of the pressure of special interests of one sort or another, which imagined that they would be advantaged by our country's becoming involved, or that we were beguiled by propaganda which came from overseas and entangled us in other people's quarrels for their benefit. All such suggestions strain the imagination to the breaking point. So gigantic an imposition upon, or self-deception by, the people of the United States on a subject of such importance and so long and thoroughly debated is inherently improbable. In addition to that, the known facts upon which our action proceeded were in themselves adequate to explain it and afford so matter-of-fact an explanation as to make it wholly unnecessary to take romantic improbabilities into account. That these speculative doubts should be suggested and that they should confuse the uninformed is not strange.



We have the authority of Pericles for the fact that men rarely adhere to the same views during the course of a war which they had upon entering it, and are likely to change their beliefs as to its causes when they look back from the consequences of their actions.<sup>1</sup> In the examination which follows I propose to review the state of official and unofficial opinion in America from the beginning of the war until our entry into it. So far as the records are available, I shall examine the effect of propaganda by belligerent nations and the cause and extent of domestic attempts, if any, to influence either public opinion or official action. I believe the result will be to demonstrate that no covert influence affected the nation's course, but that on the contrary the course of the World War as it unfolded and finally came to infringe upon vital rights of the United States inescapably led to our entry into the conflict.

Mr. Justice Holmes once said, "The vindication of the obvious is sometimes more important than the elucidation of the obscure." This is plainly such a case. From many points of view it is of the highest importance that we should see the history of this episode clearly and justly. This is true not only because it is always important to be just in our judgments of the actions of others, but because the future policy of our country is certain to be guided by what we believe to be its past. Santayana says,

<sup>1</sup> "Thucydides," Book I, Chapter CXL.

"Men are constantly being made dupes of by the things they think they know." We, as a people, cannot afford to be duped in future efforts to protect national interests and to preserve harmonious relations with international neighbors by false beliefs as to the real spring of our action in the great international crises of the past.

It is worth while to reread the case as stated by the President in his War Message:

On the 3d of February last I officially laid before you the extraordinary announcement of the Imperial German Government that on and after the 1st day of February it was its purpose to put aside all restraints of law or of humanity and use its submarines to sink every vessel that sought to approach either the ports of Great Britain and Ireland or the western coasts of Europe or any of the ports controlled by the enemies of Germany within the Mediterranean. That had seemed to be the object of the German submarine warfare earlier in the war, but since April of last year the Imperial Government had somewhat restrained the commanders of its undersea craft in conformity with its promise then given to us that passenger boats should not be sunk and that due warning would be given to all other vessels which its submarines might seek to destroy, when no resistance was offered or escape attempted, and care taken that their crews were given at least a fair chance to save their lives in their open boats. The precautions taken were meagre and haphazard enough, as was proved in distressing instance after instance in the progress of the cruel and unmanly busi-



ness, but a certain degree of restraint was observed. The new policy has swept every restriction aside. Vessels of every kind, whatever their flag, their character, their cargo, their destination, their errand, have been ruthlessly sent to the bottom without warning and without thought of help or mercy for those on board, the vessels of friendly neutrals along with those of belligerents. Even hospital ships and ships carrying relief to the sorely bereaved and stricken people of Belgium, though the latter were provided with safe-conduct through the proscribed areas by the German Government itself and were distinguished by unmistakable marks of identity, have been sunk with the same reckless lack of compassion or of principle.

I was for a little while unable to believe that such things would in fact be done by any government that had hitherto subscribed to the humane practices of civilized nations. International law had its origin in the attempt to set up some law which would be respected and observed upon the seas, where no nation had right of dominion and where lay the free highways of the world. By painful stage after stage has that law been built up, with meagre enough results, indeed, after all was accomplished that could be accomplished, but always with a clear view, at least, of what the heart and conscience of mankind demanded. This minimum of right the German Government has swept aside under the plea of retaliation and necessity and because it had no weapons which it could use at sea except these which it is impossible to employ as it is employing them without throwing to the winds all scruples of humanity or of respect for the understandings that were supposed to underlie the intercourse of the world. I am not now

thinking of the loss of property involved, immense and serious as that is, but only of the wanton and wholesale destruction of the lives of noncombatants, men, women, and children, engaged in pursuits which have always, even in the darkest periods of modern history, been deemed innocent and legitimate. Property can be paid for; the lives of peaceful and innocent people can not be. The present German submarine warfare against commerce is a warfare against mankind.

It is a war against all nations. American ships have been sunk, American lives taken, in ways which it has stirred us very deeply to learn of, but the ships and people of other neutral and friendly nations have been sunk and overwhelmed in the waters in the same way. There has been no discrimination. The challenge is to all mankind. Each nation must decide for itself how it will meet it. The choice we make for ourselves must be made with a moderation of counsel and a temperateness of judgment befitting our character and our motives as a nation. . . .

. . . There is one choice we can not make, we are incapable of making: we will not choose the path of submission and suffer the most sacred rights of our nation and our people to be ignored or violated. The wrongs against which we now array ourselves are no common wrongs; they cut to the very roots of human life.<sup>2</sup>

Upon that basis the President advised the declaration of war. His message then proceeded to discuss the practical steps to be taken. This was followed by a reference to his addresses to the Senate on January 22, 1917, and to the Congress on

<sup>2</sup> For full text see Appendix, p. 183.



February 3 and 26,<sup>3</sup> and a statement of "our motives and objects" as follows:

Our object now, as then, is to vindicate the principles of peace and justice in the life of the world as against selfish and autocratic power and to set up amongst the really free and self-governed peoples of the world such a concert of purpose and of action as will henceforth insure the observance of those principles. Neutrality is no longer feasible or desirable where the peace of the world is involved and the freedom of its peoples, and the menace to that peace and freedom lies in the existence of autocratic governments backed by organized force which is controlled wholly by their will, not by the will of their people. We have seen the last of neutrality in such circumstances. We are at the beginning of an age in which it will be insisted that the same standards of conduct and of responsibility for wrong done shall be observed among nations and their governments that are observed among the individual citizens of civilized states.

After outlining activities in the United States aimed to disrupt peace, dislocate our industry, and incite an attack upon us by Mexico, the President proceeded to say:

We are accepting this challenge of hostile purpose because we know that in such a government, following such methods, we can never have a friend; and that in the presence of its organized power, always lying in wait to accomplish we know not what purpose, there

<sup>3</sup> For full texts see Appendix, pp. 167, 174 and 178.



can be no assured security for the democratic governments of the world. . . . We are glad, now that we see the facts with no veil of false pretense about them, to fight thus for the ultimate peace of the world and for the liberation of its peoples, the German peoples included: for the rights of nations great and small and the privilege of men everywhere to choose their way of life and of obedience. The world must be made safe for democracy. Its peace must be planted upon the tested foundations of political liberty. We have no selfish ends to serve. We desire no conquest, no dominion. We seek no indemnities for ourselves, no material compensation for the sacrifices we shall freely make.

This is the statement which is now questioned. Does it speak the truth, and the whole truth, or is it rather a partial statement used to rationalize a hidden purpose and to justify a concealed intention?

To arrive at an answer to these questions it is necessary to go back to the beginning of the war in Europe and to reconstruct the atmosphere through which we Americans viewed it. It will then be possible for us to examine the conduct of the Administration with regard to American rights, affected by the actions of the belligerents, and the fluctuations of informed American opinion between August 1914 and April 1917.

## CHAPTER II

### THE UNITED STATES AND PREWAR EUROPE

**B**EFORE August 1914 the official foreign policy of the United States may be said to have centered around three principles: the Monroe Doctrine, abstention from entangling foreign alliances, and the preservation of the Open Door in the Far East. Each of these policies had been variously interpreted, as to their implications, in our diplomatic history; each had its own interesting history; and no one of them had been adhered to with formal rigidity. In general they were accepted by public opinion as policies which gave us an academic rather than a practical interest in European controversies. Our newspaper and periodical press, correctly representing public interest in such questions, treated European diplomatic entanglements rather casually, and even great conferences like those at The Hague, which attempted to deal with the rights of neutrals, limitations upon the actions of belligerents, and constructive agencies for the preservation of peace, attracted little general attention.

From the time of the Franco-Prussian War, Americans generally realized that European peace

was kept by a so-called balance of power and that from time to time the balance was exceedingly unstable, but there was no single book available in English which gave any comprehensive view of the political relations which had grown up in Europe after 1815.<sup>4</sup> A few American scholars kept themselves informed in this field and occasional magazine articles appeared, but until the outbreak of the first Balkan War there was little appreciation in America of the strains to which the European system was constantly subjected. From that time on, a constantly increasing number of Americans began to realize that the peace of Europe was threatened by a number of situations roughly characterized as Austro-Hungarian Balkan pretensions; the Baghdad Railway as evidencing Germany's thrust to the East; the emerging naval rivalry between Germany and England; and the possible menace to England's empire from Russia on the one hand and Germany on the other—all of which seemed to result in the possibility that the balance between Germany, Austria and Italy on the one side, and France and Russia on the other, was constantly threatening to be disturbed acutely by an incident growing out of a dramatic assertion of some one of these nationalistic aspirations. We Americans knew something about the military and naval budgets of the European Powers, of their land and sea

<sup>4</sup> "Europe Since 1815," by Charles D. Hazen, appeared only in 1910.



armament races, but very little indeed about the consequences of the outcome of the conflict in the German Foreign Office between those who would face German policy toward England and those who would face it toward Russia.

The very limited successes of The Hague Conferences ought, perhaps, to have alarmed us more than they did. The caveats in favor of purely nationalistic military power, interposed by some of the most civilized nations of the world, showed plainly enough the tendency to subordinate the desire for peace to a very practical assurance, by each participant, that nothing should be done to its own military disadvantage in the event of possible conflict. But American public opinion was not disposed to be either particularly informed or particularly disturbed, and maintained an attitude of academic composure throughout the Balkan Wars, the Morocco crisis, and the annexation of Bosnia, Hercegovina, and the Sanjak of Novi-Pazar as though these were events which could have no possible American consequences. Indeed, if we Americans envisaged at all the possibility of a world war, it was confined to a world of which we were not a part, and interested us chiefly as a ground for self-congratulation that a wide Atlantic and an unambitious foreign policy isolated us from any occasion for alarm.

Our people comprised representatives, in several

generations, from practically all the countries in Europe. The problem of our melting pot had nothing whatever to do with any traditional antagonisms in the home lands but concerned itself solely with the reconciliation of alien racial habits to our own institutions. To the extent that European countries were governed by more or less despotic rulers, we were against their forms of government, and we were disposed to judge the major part of Europe by broad generalizations of their temperament and culture based, at least in part, upon the conduct of such of their representatives as had come to cast their lots with us.

Because of Germany's extraordinary development, she constituted a special case in American public opinion. Her universities began sixty years ago to attract an increasing number of American students. The fame of her scholars, in all branches of human learning, was attested by epoch-making scientific discoveries and a new school of philosophical speculation and historical research. The content and technique of higher education in America was profoundly affected and our own colleges and universities were filled with men who had studied in Germany or with German scholars brought over to start on American soil the processes of research and the spirit of a new scholarship there developed. There were thus among us a large number of highly intellectual persons who knew



Germany and who watched her development with admiration not unmixed with grave concern.

The military tradition of Prussia was a commonplace in our books of elementary history. Its revival, after Waterloo and up to the Franco-Prussian War, resulted in a unification of Germany under Prussian direction and thus made the tradition of Scharnhorst and Von Clausewitz the drill book of a united German people. The lessons to Germans from the weakness of their disunion affected quite naturally the speculations of her philosophers as well as the plans of her military leaders, and there grew up in Germany an identification of Germany's destiny with her military power which dominated every other element of her national growth. It was instinctively felt in Germany that the Minnesingers would be inappropriate leaders for a militarized people, and German philosophy developed a theory of the state to meet the needs of the case. Accepting Kant's doctrine of the obligations of "duty," Fichte added the doctrine of the "great destiny" of the Germans as a people and directed them to find in "unconquerable will" the sources of power. To this Hegel added the concept of the state as the representative of the divine on earth and the consequent moral obligation of all to yield to the state unquestioned obedience. Thus we came to have in Germany an all powerful state, speaking through an All Highest

War-Lord in command of the greatest military machine the world had ever seen, and sustained by a people who had been taught to believe by their philosophers, their historians, and their religious leaders, both in the cultural supremacy of the Germans as a people, and the morality of their imposition of that culture on the rest of mankind, if necessary by the sword.

If it seems improbable that the recondite speculations of philosophers could thus become a part of the consciousness of a people, or that the outside world should form its judgment of the aspirations and probable conduct of a nation upon such a basis, it is only necessary to recall Treitschke. Under his eloquent leadership the superb scholarship of Germany became a vast system of apologetics for German supremacy stated in terms of military power. There grew up in Germany a popularization of this philosophy of life which distorted everything to its main objective and summoned the German people to prepare for immediate war "in 1915 or at the latest in 1916" according to Colonel H. T. W. Frobenius. The literature of German chauvinism became so vast that anthologies and summaries of it began to be published.<sup>5</sup> The most amazing popular exposition of this state of mind were "The German Empire's Hour of Destiny,"

<sup>5</sup> "Der deutsche Chauvinismus," Professor Doctor O. Nippold, Stuttgart, 1913.



by Frobenius, published just after the war started, and "Germany and the Next War," by General von Bernhardi, published in 1911 and immediately widely translated and generally discussed.

The phrase "der Tag," which before the war figured in America as a summary of Germany's military aspirations, vaguely connoted a war for naval supremacy with Great Britain. The consequences of German victory, however, were rarely elaborated. After the outbreak of the war in 1914, there began to appear in Germany a series of proclamations by commercial and patriotic societies, and elaborate disquisitions by publicists which made the whole subject very much more definite and menacing.

On October 28, 1917, the *New York World* published a map of the world under the caption "Here are the Kaiser's War Plans." Thirty-six areas of German dominance were marked on the map and in the margin there were numbered references to the German sources sponsoring the inclusion of the various areas as parts of the ultimate aspiration of Germany toward territorial domination of the earth. These aspirations, the map said, were not those which Germany's enemies might ascribe to her but are those ascribed by her own leaders of thought and action. The map included Norway and Sweden, the whole of the middle Europe project drawn to include the Channel coast of France, all



of Switzerland and Italy, the Baltic provinces of Russia, all of the Balkans, Turkey, and parts of Persia. It showed German dominance from Cairo to the Cape in Africa, and included roughly two-thirds of Africa as German. China, Sumatra, Borneo, Java and New Guinea in the Orient, and the whole of South America from Panama were shown as either German, German colonies, or spheres of German dominance.

Obviously no such comprehensive plan of world conquest was ever adopted by responsible German statesmen. As a matter of fact, five rival ideas competed for German popular favor. They centered around:

(1) Sea power plus annexations on the west, which in general meant the French Channel coast and the mining districts of Briey and Longwy.

(2) "Mitteleuropa," which contemplated the constitution of a central European bloc of Powers allied politically and economically, and, of course, under German military direction and, therefore, German control. This plan underwent constant expansion, starting with Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Polish lands, and Bulgaria, and, with an appetite which grew by what it fed upon, looked ultimately toward the inclusion of Belgium, Holland and the Scandinavian countries, the Baltic provinces and the Balkans, with great sections of western Russia.

(3) The aspiration known generically as "Berlin to Baghdad," which started with German control of the Ottoman Empire and knew no eastward limitation.

(4) A vast African colonial empire, sometimes pictured as running east and west from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic, and sometimes as running north and south from Cairo to Capetown.

(5) Annexations of Russian territory, such as Courland and Lithuania, which would provide room for expansion for German agriculture.

These five plans were not regarded as in conflict with one another but rather as successive steps toward the ultimate world objective, and the disputes among their partisans had to do rather with the order in which the steps should be taken than the desirability of any of the plans as a part of the general design.<sup>6</sup> (Incidentally, the actual behavior

<sup>6</sup> The literature on this subject, both of a temporary and a permanent kind, is very large. See: R. G. Usher, "Pan-Germanism" (1913); Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "Diplomatic Documents Relating to the Outbreak of the European War" (1916, 2 v.), quoting many Germans, official and unofficial, upon various aspects of German war aims; Evans Lewin, "The German Road to the East" (1916); T. G. Masaryk, "Pangermanism and the Eastern Question" (*New Europe*, 1916, p. 2-19); T. G. Masaryk, "Literature of Pangermanism" (*New Europe*, 1916, v. I, *passim*), a comprehensive study citing many authorities; Edwyn Beven, "German War Aims" (1917); A. Chéradame, "Pangerman Plot Unmasked" (1917); S. Grumbach, "Germany's Annexationist Aims" (1917); H. J. Mackinder, "Democratic Ideals and Reality" (1919); G. L. Beer, "African Questions at the Paris Peace Conference" (1923), p. 1-67; Ebba Dahlin, "French and German Public Opinion on Declared War Aims, 1914-1918" (1933).

In the authorities cited, references are found to statements by leaders of German opinion, and group declarations by persons who associated themselves together to demand of the Government that it use its anti-



of the German Government when later on it was in a position to impose its will was in harmony with this design, as witness the terms of the Treaty of Bucharest and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.)

Though part of the detailed substantiation came later, American public opinion at the time the World War began already had a very definite conception of the German theory of life and generally disapproved of it. Nobody understood this situation more clearly than Ambassador Bernstorff and it is a great tribute to his diplomatic skill as well as a conclusive evidence of the genuineness of American neutrality that American public opinion did not force decisive action earlier. At every stage, when Germany acted in complete harmony with its theory of life, as in the "Scrap of Paper" episode, the invasion of Belgium, the sinking of the *Lusitania*, and the proclamation of unrestricted submarine warfare, it not only ran counter to the

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pated victory in the war to accomplish finally these vast objectives. The years 1915 and 1916 were particularly fruitful in the production of literature of this kind in Germany. Much of it, of course, was not known in detail in the United States until after our entry into the war, or, indeed, until the postwar period, but the existence of these aspirations and the confident assertion that their achievement justified entire ruthlessness in dealing with the rights of others was known; and as the war progressed in Europe and tentative peace suggestions made from time to time failed, the opinion of Germany which existed in 1914 was steadily strengthened and deepened. That the people of the United States shrank from contemplating the consequences of German victory is true. That they would have entered the war to prevent German victory is not true. That American opinion with regard to the submarine warfare was profoundly affected by this general feeling of dread is, of course, a part of the atmosphere in which the American decision was made.

American theory of life, but seemed to Americans to be following the schedule laid down by Bernhardi of the march toward "world supremacy or downfall." When Ambassador Bernstorff testified before the Second Sub-Committee of the Committee of Inquiry of the Reichstag in April 1920, he dealt with the subject of the failure of German propaganda in the United States and said:

This brings us, of course, to the question of philosophy of life. If, in our propaganda in the United States, we had unqualifiedly found ourselves in agreement with the ideas which governed the American people, then of course we would have been much more successful with our propaganda. But since that was not the case—at least, no one believed that what we wanted was a peace of understanding, the natural result was that the propaganda fell to the ground.<sup>7</sup>

I shall have occasion later to refer to the fact that both President Wilson and Secretary Lansing are now discovered to have expressed in letters or diaries pro-Ally sympathies. That both the President and the Secretary of State shared the American view of life and wholly repudiated the philosophy of the "Knight in Shining Armor," or the pseudo-philosophy which justified him, merely means that they entertained personally the sentiments common to most Americans. The amazing

<sup>7</sup> "Official German Documents relating to the World War," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1923, v. 2, p. 928. Hereinafter referred to as German Documents.



thing, however, is not that they entertained such sentiments but that they were able, in spite of them, to maintain, through years of public sentiment repeatedly inflamed, a cold and chaste correctness in their diplomatic treatment of questions which challenged America's rights as a neutral and threatened her ultimate national interests.<sup>8</sup>

That the foregoing is an accurate account of the state of American public opinion about Germany at the outbreak of the World War can easily be verified by anyone who will take the trouble to examine the files of the great American newspapers for the early days of August 1914. In a powerful editorial in the *New York World* of August 4 of that year, Cobb, the most brilliant and perhaps the best informed editor in the country, describing the catastrophe which had overtaken Europe, assigned as its cause the military autocracy of Germany and predicted that what had been hastily begun as a war of autocracy was not unlikely to end as a war of revolution with thrones crumbling and dynasties

<sup>8</sup> Much confusion arises from the use of such terms as "national honor" and "national interest." The terms are in themselves broad enough to cover every sort of national purpose, reasonable or unreasonable. When used by thoughtful people, however, these phrases cover not merely matters of prestige. National honor is an imaginative realization of ultimate national interests. When no immediate interest is threatened, there may well be a threat to create, by precedent, a situation which will in the future make it more difficult to protect national interests when they are called into question. Far-away possibilities of that sort may be spoken of as "national honor" which may not safely be permitted to be surrendered. In this view, national honor is about the equivalent of "enlightened selfishness" from a national point of view.

in exile. Describing the progress of the Germans from the downfall of the Third Napoleon, he said:

Out of a condition of general poverty they had arisen to great wealth and prosperity. They had become the leaders and teachers of all the nations in the development of scientific industry. Their commerce reached to every nook and corner of the globe. Their ships floated on every sea. Their victories were no victories of brute force, but triumphs of applied skill and trained minds. In many respects the Germans had touched the highwater mark of human civilization. There was not another country in the world but could learn something from them.

Suddenly this vast fabric woven by peace and industry and skill and science is torn in two. All the machinery of progress is stopped by the hand of autocracy. The Kaiser plunges Europe into the most devastating conflict known to human history, and every civilized country reels under the shock. . . .

. . . The enlightened opinion of the whole world has turned against the two Kaisers as it turned against Napoleon III when he sought to make himself the autocrat of Europe.

Our periodical press was immediately flooded with articles by our greatest publicists and scholars boldly questioning whether, in such a contest, America could rightly remain neutral and pointing out the conflict of principle between the American theory of life and that which the German Empire had accepted. Of these a conspicuous example was the interview by President Eliot of

Harvard published in the *New York American* on Sunday, December 13, 1914.

Whatever may be our beliefs about the results of propaganda in this country by the respective belligerents, it must be clear that the opinion which existed at the outbreak of the war in Europe was not the result of any such propaganda, but was rather a settled state of mind formed by people who had not yet imagined the possibility of American involvement, but were too loyal to the historic ideals of their theory of life to be unconcerned at the growth of anything so ugly, so menacing, and so unchristian as a thoroughly militaristic nationalism among great and civilized peoples.

How far Germany's theory of life might be justified by experience or necessitated by her situation, it is not important for the present purpose to inquire. Postwar Europe is either giving us fresh demonstrations of the disaster inevitably inherent in such policies, or else it is ringing the knell of the cultural hopes of the race by proving them inescapable in the modern world. Time alone can tell. It is enough for us now to realize that in 1914 America was more hopeful, more confident in the ultimate triumph of democracy as she understood it, and perhaps a little less tolerant of tyranny than she has since become. To understand the course of America's diplomacy from 1914 to 1917, it is necessary for us to realize the background of public



opinion as it was, whether or not it represented the ultimate judgment of history upon the facts upon which it was based.

The war in Europe having begun, the Administration in Washington faced three great problems:

(1) The maintenance of American neutrality under unprecedented conditions.

(2) The safeguarding of so much of our domestic welfare as could be preserved in a world gone berserk.

(3) The leadership of American public opinion toward whatever salutary outcome could be achieved when the whirlwind of war died down.



### CHAPTER III

## NEUTRALITY

I SHALL not undertake to review the controversy which has arisen in the United States since the conclusion of the World War with regard to the subject of neutrality. It addresses itself to the problem of applying to future situations the experience of the past. On the one side we have the vigorous championship of Judge John Bassett Moore, the dean of our international lawyers and our greatest scholar in diplomatic history, who believes that the doctrine of neutrality, by wise and progressive administration, is the only sound basis of national policy. On the other side we have a group of younger scholars who believe that, under modern conditions, the far flung interests of nations have become so vital to the well-being of their domestic economy that the doctrine of neutrality, conceived of as isolation during the war and abstention from the protection of these outside interests, exacts the payment of an impossible price. Indeed, the latter school goes so far as to believe that the intensity and the scope of modern war are such that nations facing extinction will, in their desperation, resort to any encroachment upon neutral rights and interests which seems to afford even a last straw of hope in their desperation, and that, therefore, how-

ever correct and well disposed a neutral nation may try to be, its rights will be disregarded and its interests injured by any belligerent to whom their breach becomes a *tabula in naufragio*.

In August 1914 there was such a thing as a doctrine of neutrality. It governed, by universal acceptance, definitions of the rights of blockade, search and seizure on the high seas, contraband, and the rights of neutrals to sell to belligerents supplies, including arms and ammunition, subject to definite limitations. Dating from Grotius and Puffendorf, but subjected in each generation to fresh examination and modification, with a wide border of uncertainty as to their implications, these rules nevertheless governed foreign offices and regulated, so far as anything regulated, the amenities of international relations. Serious efforts at restatement of this so-called international law were made from time to time. Thus at the two Hague Conferences in 1899 and 1907, projects were made and considered dealing with the rules of land and sea warfare both as affecting combatants and neutrals. These conferences, in the language of Elihu Root, "present the greatest advance ever made at any single time toward the reasonable and peaceful regulation of international conduct."<sup>9</sup>

As one reads the ambitious projects set forth in the proceedings of the Hague Conferences and

<sup>9</sup> Senate Document No. 444, 60th Congress, First Session, p. 62.

then reads the modest Conventions which resulted from them, he realizes the extreme difficulty of concerted international action and the necessary slowness of any progress toward an international world government by law.<sup>10</sup> There were, however, some achievements, including a Convention comprising thirty-three articles dealing with rights and duties of neutral powers in naval war adopted at the second Conference. No principle of the law of neutrality was more firmly fixed than that it would be unneutral to change the rules after the beginning of a war. The policy, therefore, of any state which undertook to be neutral toward the European War of 1914 had to be fashioned upon its own historic interpretation of its rights and duties as a neutral prior to the beginning of that conflict. A practice had also become well settled that disputes between belligerents and neutrals, arising in the area of disputed rules, would normally be made the basis of diplomatic correspondence ending in solemnly filed protests and leading to postwar adjustments either by negotiation or arbitration, but not leading to a forceful assertion of the rights claimed by the neutral unless the neutral was either in fact unneutral and was seeking an occasion to associate itself with one or the other of the belligerents, or interests which the neutral deemed vital

<sup>10</sup> "The Reports to the Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907," edited by James Brown Scott, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1917.



and of which it could not postpone the vindication were thought to be invaded.

Accordingly on August 4, 1914, the President issued a proclamation declaring the neutrality of the United States and, in the usual form, prohibiting acts by citizens of the United States in violation of it. It is interesting to note that in this first official declaration the President said :

... the laws and treaties of the United States, without interfering with the free expression of opinion and sympathy, or with the commercial manufacture or sale of arms or munitions of war, nevertheless impose upon all persons who may be within their territory and jurisdiction the duty of an impartial neutrality during the existence of the contest....<sup>11</sup>

This proclamation was, of course, drawn in the State Department by experts; but the President's mind went much beyond an injunction of official propriety of action, and on August 19, 1914, he addressed the Senate on the subject of neutrality, pointing out that the effect of the war upon the United States would depend upon the behavior of the people of the United States. As our people were drawn from many nations, chiefly those involved in the war, the President foresaw that there would be the utmost variety of sympathy among them with regard to the issues of the conflict. He said, "Some

<sup>11</sup> "The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson," Baker and Dodd, "The New Democracy," Harper, 1926, v. I, p. 151. Hereinafter referred to as New Democracy.

will wish one nation, others another, to succeed in the momentous struggle. It will be easy to excite passion and difficult to allay it." He then pointed out that:

Such divisions amongst us would be fatal to our peace of mind and might seriously stand in the way of the proper performance of our duty as the one great nation at peace, the one people holding itself ready to play a part of impartial mediation and speak the counsels of peace and accommodation, not as a partisan, but as a friend.

I venture, therefore, my fellow countrymen, to speak a solemn word of warning to you against that deepest, most subtle, most essential breach of neutrality which may spring out of partisanship, out of passionately taking sides. The United States must be neutral in fact as well as in name during these days that are to try men's souls. We must be impartial in thought as well as in action, must put a curb upon our sentiments as well as upon every transaction that might be construed as a preference of one party to the struggle before another. (New Democracy, v. I, p. 158)

From the beginning of the war in Europe until our entry into it, the President continued in this attempt to instruct and lead public opinion. Sometimes he addressed the American people in the form of addresses to the Congress, sometimes in letters to individuals made public. He took occasion to address religious bodies and companies of almost every sort. These addresses are found in the



public papers of the President as edited by Baker and Dodd, known generally as "The New Democracy," Volume I, and include such addresses as those to the Southern Methodist Conference, March 25, 1915; the Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church, April 18, 1915; the Daughters of the American Revolution, April 19, 1915; and the address to seven thousand foreign-born citizens made in Philadelphia May 10, 1915, which contained the much misunderstood phrase "too proud to fight," which, under the circumstances and with its real meaning, was at once one of the bravest and noblest of his utterances. I shall later have occasion to refer to the central theme of all these addresses by the President. In this connection, however, they are referred to merely as declarations of the most public kind in support of the officially proclaimed neutrality of the country, than which nothing could have been either more positive or more definite. However casually American public opinion may have dealt with these declarations, as their repeated statement afforded items of daily news, it is safe to say that there were two groups of people who not only read every word of them, but studied every action of the President, and of all his responsible advisers, to detect the least departure by act from the national policy thus verbally declared. These groups were the foreign representatives in this country of the belligerents. Both sets of countries



were represented in Washington by diplomats of long experience and high intelligence and the situation made every word and act of the United States important to their countries, not only in the conduct of their warlike operations, but also in the mobilization of the moral sentiment of the world, which each side recognized as an imponderable but powerful force in the ultimate outcome.

The British Ambassador throughout this period was Sir Cecil Spring Rice. His letters were published in 1929.<sup>12</sup> Those who knew Sir Cecil were not surprised to discover the frankness, if not the indiscretion, with which he detailed to his friends from day to day his view of the American scene. He was, at least diplomatically, suspicious of everybody's professions and temperamentally impatient of idealisms. As a consequence, he had difficulty in concealing from Mr. Bryan what he revealed very fully in his letters to his friends—his impatience with Mr. Bryan's desire to discuss peace treaties and peace objectives in any general sense. With regard to the President, however, he formed two very definite opinions.

First, Ambassador Spring Rice believed that the President was extremely susceptible to public opinion and could be relied upon to take no decisive action until he was sure that it was in response to a

<sup>12</sup> "The Letters and Friendships of Sir Cecil Spring Rice," edited by Stephen Gwynn, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1929, 2 v. Hereinafter referred to as Spring Rice.

strong preponderance of approval in the public mind. About this he was wrong. The President did realize the futility and difficulty of official action in the face of adverse public opinion and, therefore, often delayed official action until he could instruct and lead public opinion. Members of the President's Cabinet will recall many difficult moments, however, when the President said, in effect, "If what we are preparing to do is right, and public opinion is at the moment uninformed and wrong, our duty is to do what is right." Believing, however, as he did on this subject, Sir Cecil was especially alert to watch and gauge the ebb and flow of public opinion in the United States as between the Allies and the Central Powers. This observation he used as a guide in determining whether or not any deliberate propaganda in the United States by the Allies would be serviceable and, if so, what sort of propaganda was likeliest to make a strong appeal. Thus on October 21, 1914, he wrote to Lord Newton:

Thank you for writing. On the whole it has seemed wisest to do nothing against the German propaganda which is conducted by hired agents backed with large sums of money. This seems to be more than met by the willing and unorganized correspondents who answer their articles in the newspapers. Public speaking would be fatal, because people here don't like to be preached at: they like to think they are neutral and make up their minds. First and foremost, we must fight our own bat-

tles, and fight them well. The rest will follow of itself. If you came out and talked to people, I am sure you would have an effect on them if you did it in the ordinary way of accidental conversation. But if they thought you came out to preach at them, they would immediately suspect you of imposing your opinions on their free and unbiassed minds.

About ninety per cent. of the English-speaking people, and half the Irish, are on the side of the Allies; and in the glorious annals of German achievements nothing is so remarkable as the fact that Germany has almost made England popular in America. . . . (Spring Rice, v. II, p. 239)

In a letter, dated November 13, 1914, to Sir Arthur Nicolson, he says:

Bryan spoke to me about peace as he always does. He sighs for the Nobel Prize, and besides that he is a really convinced peaceman. He has just given me a sword beaten into a ploughshare six inches long to serve as a paperweight. It is adorned with quotations from Isaiah and himself. No one doubts his sincerity, but that is rather embarrassing for us at the present moment, because he is always at us with peace propositions. This time, he said he could not understand why we could not say what we were fighting for. The nation which continued war had as much responsibility as the country which began it. The United States was the one great Power which was outside the struggle, and it was their duty to do what they could to put an end to it.—I felt rather cross and said that the United States were signatories to the Hague Convention, which had been grossly violated again and again without one word



from the principal neutral nation. They were now out of court. They had done nothing to prevent the crime, and now they must not prevent the punishment.—He said that all the Powers concerned had been disappointed in their ambitions. Germany had not taken Paris. France had not retaken Alsace, England had not cleared the seas of the German Navy. The last month had made no appreciable difference in the relative positions of the armies, and there was now no prospect of an issue satisfactory to any Power. Why should they not make peace now, if they had to make peace a year hence after another year's fruitless struggle. It would be far wiser if each said what it was fighting for and asked the United States to help them in arriving at a peaceful conclusion. . . . (Spring Rice, v. II, p. 240)

Sir Cecil's second settled conviction was that the President had set his heart upon preserving the United States and himself, as its representative, in a position of such equal relationship to all the parties as would make us an impartial mediator when the belligerents were ready to consider peace. In a letter to Lord Grey of December 11, 1914, he says, narrating the position of the Government of the United States on the subject of contraband:

But here comes in a point on which the United States Government lays great stress. The sale and export of contraband is legal. The United States must not take any measure in order to prevent the export of contraband, because this would be an unneutral act. But if the exporter for his own convenience wishes that a foreign government should know what is contained on board

the ship, there is no reason why such an arrangement should not be carried out. And this is now being done with success. . . .

If there is any chance of the Administration agreeing to such a measure as the prohibition of the sale of arms and ammunition, it will become necessary to point out that such unneutral action would disqualify the government from the office of an impartial mediator. And this impartial mediation is the most cherished ambition of the President, who rightly thinks that he would thereby do an imperishable service to humanity. I have no doubt that this idea, to which prominence is given in his message, is dominant in his mind, although he fully understands that until the proper moment has come his impartial mediation would be worse than the most active and belligerent participation in the present war. (Spring Rice, v. II, p. 247)

In a letter to Sir Valentine Chirol of November 27, 1914, after discussing the partisan political criticism to which an American administration is necessarily subjected, and particularly the effect of the well-organized German vote, he says:

. . . Wilson and his Cabinet are accused of being pro-English, with the result that they are disposed if anything to be pro-German. They certainly studiously avoid any action which could possibly be interpreted as partial to us or unfriendly to Germany. . . .

. . . But at the present moment the larger part of the American people are with us or rather against our enemies, not from our merits but owing to the demerits of the antagonist. Their deeds are mightier than their words. . . . (Spring Rice, v. II, p. 248-9)



That Sir Cecil was right in his judgment that it was President Wilson's most cherished ambition that he might do an "imperishable service to humanity" by acting as an impartial mediator is borne out by all the evidence we have on that subject. The significant part of the Spring Rice letters at the moment, however, is that in spite of their racy candor and indiscretion, in spite of their hasty judgments and suspicions, and in spite of the fact that many of these letters were written to those Americans least likely to take a charitable view of any act or word of President Wilson, nevertheless, from beginning to end, there is no suggestion that Sir Cecil regarded the Administration as unneutral. On the contrary, all of the suggestions point to a disposition on the part of the British Ambassador to use the known desire of the Administration to preserve the severest neutrality as the most influential argument in controversies where it would be possible on behalf of the Allies to claim that a proposed action by the United States might be a departure from that attitude.

The most active, energetic, and intelligent representative of the Central Powers in the United States was, of course, Ambassador Bernstorff. For a variety of reasons, controversies between the United States and Germany were, from the beginning, of a more disturbing kind than those created by seizures of alleged contraband on American



ships in European waters out of which our controversies with the Allies grew. From the very beginning there was an accumulation of alleged violations of our laws on our own soil by persons acting either as German agents, or out of German sympathy. The German Ambassador said that these incidents were a constant source of annoyance and embarrassment to him because, he said, "... nothing could be imagined more certain to militate against my policy, as I have here described it, than these outrages and the popular indignation aroused by them." In 1920, Count Bernstorff published a narrative entitled "My Three Years in America." In that he gives his final judgment of the subject of the Administration's neutrality:

... President Wilson, therefore, on the 18th of August, 1914, issued a proclamation to the American people which is of special interest because *it lays down in a definite form the policy to which he logically and unwaveringly adhered until the rupture.* (Italics mine)

In this proclamation the following sentences occur: "Every man who really loves America will act and speak in the true spirit of neutrality, which is the spirit of impartiality and fairness and friendliness to all concerned." And further: "The people of the United States ... may be divided in camps of hostile opinion. ... Such divisions among us would be fatal to our peace of mind and might seriously stand in the way of the proper performance of our duty as the one great nation at peace, the one people holding itself ready to play a part of impartial mediation and speak the counsels of

peace and accommodation, not as a partisan, but as a friend."

The policy outlined in these quotations from Mr. Wilson's proclamation won the approval of an overwhelming majority of the American people, for even among the supporters of the Entente there was only a small minority who desired an active participation in the war by the United States.<sup>13</sup>

The view thus expressed by Count Bernstorff was clearly the view of the German Government throughout the whole period under consideration. The German Foreign Office had many sources of information, receiving reports directly from the Ambassador and from various members of his staff, and in addition to that from a large number of special agents in the United States charged with independent missions and responsibilities here and reporting directly to Berlin.

In 1919 the German National Constituent Assembly appointed a committee to inquire into the responsibility for the war. The Second Sub-Committee conducted extensive hearings and had before it, as witnesses, all of the principal officials of the Foreign Office and of the foreign service. Testifying before that committee, in the presence of Dr. Helfferich, Bethmann-Hollweg and the principal experts of the Foreign Office, Ambassador Bernstorff said:

<sup>13</sup> "My Three Years in America," Count Bernstorff, Scribner, 1920, p. 58-9. Hereinafter referred to as Bernstorff.



Everyone knows that, in forming a judgment on American matters, the President alone is not the only one to be taken into consideration, but public opinion must also be taken into consideration. An American President is not at all in the position of accomplishing anything in the face of public opinion. He can influence it, perhaps, and perhaps stay it, but he can not accomplish anything against it. In order to form a judgment concerning dealings of the United States, it is essential, first of all, to be absolutely certain as to the condition of public opinion. I should like to emphasize this point particularly, because, during the first period, when public opinion in the United States was not neutral, so far as we were concerned, but unfriendly, it was not possible for the government to accomplish certain things. So far as I can judge, generally speaking, the government maintained a neutral standpoint. If my recollection is correct, the legal division of the Foreign Office has always been of the opinion that, formally speaking, the American Government was neutral. (German Documents, v. II, p. 725)

The opinion thus publicly expressed was not challenged by any of the representatives of the Foreign Office. Some of the witnesses expressed a rather naïve disappointment that the United States did not use its power to force Germany's views and interests upon the Allies. Indeed, there seems to have been a feeling that the President missed a good many opportunities to be helpful, but there is no suggestion that he failed to be neutral.

The record of the official relations of the United



States to the belligerent countries confirms the view of its actions taken by these authoritative representatives of the belligerent countries who were in this country devoting themselves to observing and criticizing the Government's actions.

## CHAPTER IV

1914

THE Declaration of London, dated February 26, 1909, had never been ratified by the President of the United States, although the Senate, in April 1912, advised its ratification. The chapters dealing with blockade in time of war, contraband of war, unneutral service, destruction of neutral prizes, enemy character, convoy, resistance to search, and compensation, and comprising 71 articles, was a practical attempt to restate the generally recognized principles of international law. It had not been unconditionally accepted by Great Britain or Germany, but the American Administration recognized its importance and upon the outbreak of the war at once proposed to the belligerent Powers that it should be adopted as applicable to naval warfare during the European conflict. Under date of August 6, 1914, Secretary Bryan instructed Ambassador Page to inquire whether the British Government would be willing to make such an agreement, providing the governments with whom Great Britain is, or may be, at war also agree to such application. In that dispatch Mr. Bryan said: "You will further state that this Government believes that acceptance of these laws by the belligerents would prevent grave misunder-

standings which may arise as to the relations between belligerent and neutral powers. It, therefore, earnestly hopes that this inquiry may receive favorable consideration.”<sup>14</sup> On August 22, 1914, the British Foreign Office replied to Ambassador Page’s inquiry that Great Britain had “decided to adopt generally the rules of the Declaration in question subject to certain modifications and additions which they judge indispensable to the efficient conduct of their naval operations.” (Maritime Commerce, v. II, p. 195) On September 26, 1914, Mr. Lansing, as Acting Secretary of State, sent to Ambassador Page a comprehensive note reciting that the Governments at Berlin and Vienna had “replied that the Declaration of London would be observed by them upon condition of a like observance on the part of their adversaries;” (Maritime Commerce, v. II, p. 198) but Mr. Lansing’s note then proceeds to discuss the keen disappointment of the Government of the United States that Great Britain had refused to accept the Declaration of London without amendment and again urging its acceptance, pointing out that the Orders in Council, already issued by the British Government, were unacceptable modifications of the Declaration of London. In concluding his note Mr. Lansing said:

<sup>14</sup> “Policy of the United States toward Maritime Commerce in War,” Carlton Savage, v. II, 1914-1918, p. 185. Hereinafter referred to as Maritime Commerce.



It is a matter of grave concern to this Government that the particular conditions of this unfortunate war should be considered by His Britannic Majesty's Government to be such as to justify them in advancing doctrines and advocating practices which in the past aroused strong opposition on the part of the Government of the United States, and bitter feeling among the American people. This Government feels bound to express the fear, though it does so reluctantly, that the publicity, which must be given to the rules which His Majesty's Government announce that they intend to enforce, will awaken memories of controversies, which it is the earnest desire of the United States to forget or to pass over in silence. This Government in view of these considerations ventures to suggest in no unkindly spirit and with the sole purpose of preserving the mutual good will which now exists between the people of the United States and the people of Great Britain, that the British Government may find it possible to modify their intention before it has been put into practice, as its realization seems fraught with possible misunderstandings which the United States desires at all times to avoid, and especially at the present when the relations of the two countries are so cordial and when their friendship rests upon the secure foundation of the mutual esteem and common ideals of their respective peoples. (Maritime Commerce, v. II, p. 205)

An active correspondence was kept up between the State Department and Ambassador Page in an effort to induce the British Government to change its position on this subject; but on October 24 the State Department abandoned further efforts in that

direction and instructed American diplomatic representatives in Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Russia and Belgium that its suggestion was withdrawn "on account of the unwillingness of some of the belligerents to accept the Declaration without modification, . . ." This instruction then proceeded to say:

... therefore this Government will insist that the rights and duties of the United States and its citizens in the present war be defined by the existing rules of international law and the treaties of the United States, irrespective of the provisions of the Declaration, and that this Government reserves to itself the right to enter a protest or demand in each case in which those rights and duties so defined are violated, or their free exercise interfered with, by the authorities of the belligerent governments. (Maritime Commerce, v. II, p. 221)

Ambassador Page had already cabled to the State Department the result of the conferences between himself and representatives of Spain, Holland, and all the Scandinavian States, comprising the principal neutrals. These conferences were for the purpose of exploring the possibility of the assertion of neutral rights in view of new lists of contraband and conditional contraband issued by Great Britain. The only agreement reached apparently was that neutrals "can do nothing but acquiesce and file protests and claims." (Maritime Commerce, v. II, p. 214)



There was thus a general recognition, from the very beginning, of the policy of protest. All the neutral countries followed the same course. This did not mean any abandonment by the neutrals of their rights, but rather was a recognition of the fact that every violation of a nation's right is not necessarily a *casus belli*. Whether or not force shall be used to vindicate any particular right at a particular time must always be determined by considerations of the importance of the right and the adequacy of reparation later, under less disturbed conditions. Our own diplomatic practice afforded many examples of situations in which palpable and destructive violations of our rights came at a time when it was not convenient to enforce them, as for instance in the case of privateers, fitted out in English ports during the Civil War. Our Ambassador, Charles Francis Adams, lodged circumstantial and detailed protests with the British Government. These later became the basis of arbitration proceedings, in the matter of the Alabama claims, in which the United States received an award compensating it for the destruction of its commerce by the ships which Great Britain, as a neutral, should have prevented from fitting out in her ports. Where the damage is a mere compensable injury to commerce, the question always is whether the national patience will suffice to permit a postponement of redress.



The same kind of question arises with increasing frequency in the modern world where the domestic economy of nations is adjusted to depend, to some degree, upon fairly constant trade with neighboring countries. When one of these neighboring countries undergoes internal disturbance, its trade relations are broken. These disturbances sometimes last a long period of years and produce violence and disorder which overlap boundaries. No country would deny the right of revolution to the people of another country, yet each country must answer for itself, and in the light of surrounding conditions, the question as to how long a peaceful nation shall endure a disturbance of its own domestic situation, with infractions of the peace of its frontier, because one of its neighbors is unable to restore and maintain order among its own people. Our own last contact with the problem in this form came when Mexico began its series of revolutions after the overthrow of Diaz. Over a long period of years the disturbance of our economy and the violations of our rights created great agitation among us in favor of an assertion of power to compel peace, but under Presidents Taft and Wilson we inaugurated the policy of "watchful waiting" and avoided war. The wisdom of this course later became manifest when we were involved in a much more serious war and Mexico began to find readjustment and peace for herself.

Two sorts of trouble sprang up at once. The British Government began to revise the list of contraband and conditional contraband to meet what is called the conditions of modern war, and business men in the United States began at once to flood the State Department with inquiries as to their rights and the extent to which the Government would assure them protection. Throughout the remainder of the year, controversies between the State Department and the British Government were constant and the expression of views by the United States was positive, definite, and unyielding. At the same time the State Department began a series of statements of America's claims of right to boards of trade and exporting companies, and on August 15, 1914, issued a Public Circular on neutrality dealing with the whole subject of American rights and German and English declarations on contraband over the signature of Cone Johnson, Solicitor of the State Department.<sup>15</sup>

An examination of the English declarations on contraband discloses that it no longer was restricted to things traditionally regarded as munitions of war but included, as conditional contraband, foodstuffs, clothing, precious metals, fuels, and a large number of other categories normally regarded as necessary for the support of civil populations.

<sup>15</sup> "Foreign Relations," 1914, Supplement, p. 274. Hereinafter referred to as F. R. S., 1914.

## CHAPTER V

1915

THE year 1915 reproduced, under more modern conditions, the struggle between Napoleon and Great Britain in which each set at naught the established rules and practices of international law and disregarded the rights of neutrals. The Berlin and Milan Decrees on the one side, and the British Orders in Council on the other, showed the extent to which desperate and determined nations will go. History, both before and since, has demonstrated that belligerents will respect neutral rights only so far and so long as they do not interfere with their chances of success in the war, and that whenever the danger of losing the war becomes sufficiently great, the right of the neutral will be sacrificed even to the point of adding an ally to the enemy. In like fashion, this experience demonstrates that neutral nations can rely upon their neutral rights only to the extent that they have the power and disposition to enforce them when they become an inconvenience to one or the other of the belligerents.

The year opened with an attempt to live under the "working arrangement" which Ambassador Page had effected a month before. Meantime we conducted an active correspondence with the British Government through the American Ambassa-



dor in London attempting to limit extensions of the list of contraband and lodging protests against all actions of the British Navy in violation of the rights claimed by America as a neutral.

In February the German Government established a governmental control of the nation's food supply, and the British Government retaliated by replying that subsequent shipments of foodstuffs must be regarded as destined for the German Government. This led to a suggestion that Germany should agree that imported foodstuffs should not be diverted to its armed force; that Great Britain should in return not place food in the absolute contraband list; and that both countries should agree that they would not use submarines to attack merchant vessels, sow floating mines on the high seas or fixed mines, except for harbor defensive purposes, and that they should require their respective merchant vessels not to use neutral flags.<sup>16</sup> This suggestion was not accepted by the British, but in the German Foreign Office it was regarded as a helpful suggestion aimed at the solution of the whole problem and as an evidence of the State Department's wisdom and fairness.

Meantime, Great Britain had designated the waters between Scotland and Norway as a war area and Germany retaliated on February 4, 1915, by

<sup>16</sup> "Foreign Relations," 1915, Supplement, p. 119. Hereinafter referred to as F. R. S., 1915.

declaring that all the waters surrounding Great Britain and Ireland were a war area in which neutral ships might become victims of torpedoes aimed at enemy ships. As this marked the entry of the submarine into this tangle of controversies about neutral rights, it may be of interest to note that Secretary Bryan made it the occasion of two important communications—one to Ambassador Page deploring the use of the American flag as a *ruse de guerre* while in British waters, a practice which, in view of the German war zone declaration, imperiled the safety of all neutral ships approaching Great Britain; and a second communication to the German Government pointing out the danger of the course determined upon and the grave consequences likely to follow the sacrifice of American lives involved. The following paragraphs from the message to Ambassador Gerard are highly significant:

The Government of the United States views those possibilities with such grave concern that it feels it to be its privilege, and indeed its duty in the circumstances, to request the Imperial German Government to consider before action is taken the critical situation in respect of the relations between this country and Germany which might arise were the German naval forces, in carrying out the policy foreshadowed in the Admiralty's proclamation, to destroy any merchant vessel of the United States or cause the death of American citizens.



It is of course not necessary to remind the German Government that the sole right of a belligerent in dealing with neutral vessels on the high seas is limited to visit and search, unless a blockade is proclaimed and effectively maintained, which this Government does not understand to be proposed in this case. To declare or exercise a right to attack and destroy any vessel entering a prescribed area of the high seas without first certainly determining its belligerent nationality and the contraband character of its cargo would be an act so unprecedented in naval warfare that this Government is reluctant to believe that the Imperial Government of Germany in this case contemplates it as possible. The suspicion that enemy ships are using neutral flags improperly can create no just presumption that all ships traversing a prescribed area are subject to the same suspicion. It is to determine exactly such questions that this Government understands the right of visit and search to have been recognized.

This Government has carefully noted the explanatory statement issued by the Imperial German Government at the same time with the proclamation of the German Admiralty, and takes this occasion to remind the Imperial German Government very respectfully that the Government of the United States is open to none of the criticisms for unneutral action to which the German Government believe the governments of certain other neutral nations have laid themselves open; that the Government of the United States has not consented to or acquiesced in any measures which may have been taken by the other belligerent nations in the present war which operate to restrain neutral trade, but has, on the contrary, taken in all such matters a position



which warrants it in holding those governments responsible in the proper way for any untoward effects upon American shipping which the accepted principles of international law do not justify; and that it, therefore, regards itself as free in the present instance to take with a clear conscience and upon accepted principles the position indicated in this note.

If the commanders of German vessels of war should act upon the presumption that the flag of the United States was not being used in good faith and should destroy on the high seas an American vessel or the lives of American citizens, it would be difficult for the Government of the United States to view the act in any other light than as an indefensible violation of neutral rights which it would be very hard indeed to reconcile with the friendly relations now so happily subsisting between the two Governments.

If such a deplorable situation should arise, the Imperial German Government can readily appreciate that the Government of the United States would be constrained to hold the Imperial German Government to a strict accountability for such acts of their naval authorities and to take any steps it might be necessary to take to safeguard American lives and property and to secure to American citizens the full enjoyment of their acknowledged rights on the high seas. (F.R.S., 1915, p. 98-9)

From the outset, the Government insisted upon a sharp distinction between damages to property and the sacrifice of life, and thus, three months before the sinking of the *Lusitania*, the State Department had warned the German Government that it

would be held to "a strict accountability" for the acts of its naval commanders and that the American Government reserved the right to take any steps necessary to safeguard American lives.

From this time forward, the controversies between the United States and the British Government, about delays and damages to neutral cargoes, continued with unabated insistence by the Washington Government, but whenever this correspondence approached a crisis, a German submarine attack would intervene involving the loss of American lives and diverting American official attention and indignation to the German Government.<sup>17</sup> The tension in the English correspondence would consequently relax, not because of any abatement of vigor in the assertion of our rights but because both official and unofficial opinion in the United States had something very much more urgent, dramatic, and important about which to concern itself.

After the war zone declaration of February 4, events in the submarine controversy moved rapidly to a tragic climax. On March 28, the British ship *Falaba* was torpedoed and sunk and an American, Leon C. Thrasher, lost his life. Secretary Bryan, Mr. Lansing, then Counsellor of the State Department, and the President debated the proper course of action. Mr. Bryan took the view that Americans

<sup>17</sup> "The World Crisis," Winston Churchill, Scribner, 1923, v. II, p. 306.



who entered the war zone did so at their own risk. Mr. Lansing's view is shown by his letter of April 7 to the Secretary which, in addition to pointing out the only alternatives to be considered, enumerated the multiplying difficulties which were beginning to beset American-German relations:

The great importance of the Thrasher case, to my mind, lies in the fact that a course of action must be adopted, which can be consistently applied to similar cases, if they should arise in the future. For example, suppose another British vessel should be sunk in the same way as the *Falaba* and ten Americans on board the vessel should be drowned. What would be done in that case? Or suppose a neutral vessel with Americans on board should be torpedoed and the Americans drowned. What then would be done? It seems to me that, for the sake of the future, we cannot afford to allow expediency or avoidance of the issue to control our action in the Thrasher case.

Either one of two courses seems to be open:

1. To warn Americans generally to keep out of the German war zone, if on board a merchant vessel, which is not of American nationality.

2. To hold Germany to a strict accountability for every American life lost by submarine attack on the high seas.

The adoption of the first course amounts to an admission of the legality of establishing a war zone, such as Germany has done, or at least to an admission that the illegality is open to question.

The adoption of the second course would be more nearly in accord with our position denying the legality



of the war zone and holding Germany responsible for indiscriminate attack within that area of the high seas.

Expediency in the particular case of Thrasher would favor the adoption of a policy resulting in the first course suggested, but the dignity of the Government and its duty toward its citizens appears to demand a policy in harmony with the second course.

The difficulty with the second course is chiefly that our relations with the German Government are becoming increasingly strained, as shown by the questions pending, namely:

1. The Thrasher case. 2. The *Pisa* case. 3. The *Odenwald* case. 4. The Pinchot affair. 5. The *Prinz Eitel Friedrich* case. 6. The arrest of the German Consul at Seattle. 7. The withdrawal of our military observers from Germany. 8. The demand for an embargo on arms and ammunition.

If any other course can be found, which will relieve the present tension in our relations, and at the same time preserve American rights, so that in the future this Government will not be charged with indifference to the death of Americans, or with a failure to do its duty in supporting its rights, I would strongly favor such a course. I have given careful thought to the subject, but am unable to offer any suggestion which will meet these conditions. (Maritime Commerce, v. II, p. 296-7)

On April 22, in a letter to Secretary Bryan, the President restated the views, from which he never departed, as follows:

Although I have been silent for a long time about the case, I have had it much in my mind, as I have no

doubt you have, to work out some practicable course of action with regard to the death of Thrasher; and I have the following to suggest as the outline of a note to the German Government:

(1) State the circumstances, as we have officially received them.

(2) We take it for granted that Germany has had no idea of changing the rules (or, rather, the essential principles) of international law with regard to the safety of non-combatants and of the citizens of neutral countries at sea, however radical the present change in practical conditions of warfare; and that she will, in accordance with her usual frankness in such matters, acknowledge her responsibility in the present instance.

(3) Raise in a very earnest, though of course entirely friendly, way the whole question of the use of submarines against merchant vessels, calling attention circumstantially to the impossibility of observing the safeguards and precautions so long and so clearly recognized as imperative in such matters: the duty of visit and search; the duty, if the vessel proves to belong to an enemy and cannot be put in charge of a prize crew, to secure the safety of the lives of those on board; etc.

(4) On these grounds enter a very moderately worded but none the less solemn and emphatic protest against the whole thing, as contrary to laws based, not on mere interest or convenience, but on humanity, fair play, and a necessary respect for the rights of neutrals.

My idea, as you will see, is to put the whole note on very high grounds,—not on the loss of this single man's life, but on the interests of mankind which are involved and which Germany has always stood for; on the manifest impropriety of a single nation's essaying to alter



the understandings of nations; and as all arising out of her mistake in employing an instrument against her enemy's commerce which it is impossible to employ in that use in accordance with any rules that the world is likely to be willing to accept. (Maritime Commerce, v. II, p. 299-300)

While this discussion proceeded, an aërial attack was made on the American steamship *Cushing*, the American steamship *Gulflight* was torpedoed and sunk with a loss of three American lives, and in the New York newspapers of May 1, 1915, the German Embassy inserted an advertisement warning prospective travellers against entering the war zone on ships of Great Britain or any of her allies:

Travellers intending to embark on the Atlantic voyage are reminded that a state of war exists between Germany and her allies and Great Britain and her allies; that the zone of war includes the waters adjacent to the British Isles; that in accordance with formal notice given by the Imperial German Government, vessels flying the flag of Great Britain or any of her allies, are liable to destruction in those waters and that travellers sailing in the war zone on ships of Great Britain or her allies do so at their own risk.<sup>18</sup>

Then came the sinking of the *Lusitania*! She had sailed from New York on May 1, the date the above warning appeared in the newspapers. On May 7 as she zigzagged homeward off the coast of

<sup>18</sup> "Woodrow Wilson, Life and Letters: Neutrality, 1914-1915," Ray Stannard Baker, Doubleday, 1935, p. 322.



Ireland, opposite Old Head of Kinsale lighthouse she was struck by a single torpedo and sank in eighteen minutes. Of the 1,959 persons aboard, 1,257 passengers and 702 crew, 1,195 were lost. Of the 159 Americans, 124 were lost, and of the 129 children, 94 were lost. Of the children 39 were babies and 35 of them drowned. Among the Americans lost were Elbert Hubbard and his wife, Charles Frohman, Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt, and others who were widely known and whose loss gave an intimate quality to the tragedy.

The shock of this disaster literally overwhelmed America and public opinion never recovered from it. Then in truth began a process of "tramping out the vintage, Where the grapes of wrath are stored" which never let up. Claims were made that the *Lusitania* was armed and carried ammunition for the Allies. The circumstantial report of the Collector of the Port of New York proved conclusively that the *Lusitania* carried no armament, offensive or defensive. It equally proved, however, that a very substantial part of her cargo consisted of small arms ammunition for the Allies, and the attempt was made to justify the action of the submarine commander as an effort to prevent ammunition from reaching enemy hands. However, the export of arms and ammunition by a neutral, to any belligerent in a position to receive them, was legitimate under the rules of war as they then stood, and

the presence of such contraband merely subjected the carrying vessel to the rules of cruiser warfare and did not justify its sinking without warning and without affording an opportunity to passengers to escape. Consequently the nature of the cargo did not weigh heavily in the popular judgment upon the sinking of the vessel. The incident was officially refrigerated in a succession of diplomatic notes, and remained unsettled when we entered the war, but it continued white hot in the public memory, exacerbated by ill-advised attempts at justification by German representatives in America and reports of rejoicing in Germany which treated the sinking of an unarmed ship full of non-combatants and children as a victory. Pulpit and press joined in horrified denunciation of the theory of frightfulness which made war on non-combatants, and leaders of public opinion like ex-President Roosevelt called for war as the only answer to a nation gone savage with all the perverted instrumentalities of science in its hands.

As the submarine finally won the war for the Allies by deliberately bringing America into the war, it is important to trace its history from the sinking of the *Lusitania* until April 1917 when we entered the conflict.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> A full and vivid account of the effect of the sinking of the *Lusitania* on public opinion in America is given in "Road to War," by Walter Millis. Upon this subject, as indeed upon all subjects connected with the World War, or any other war, Mr. Millis can be trusted for



President Wilson in the face of this popular storm remained silent. It has sometimes been said that he was inaccessible to advice. This statement was completely disproved for me by my five years' intimate association with him, but it is true to say that his mind positively refused to be stampeded. He had the patience of a scholar coupled with the grimness of a covenanter, and while all the rest of the people of the United States were expressing their emotions according to their temperaments, he held his in leash, determined to know all the facts first and then to act. It must constantly be remembered that from the very beginning of the war in Europe, President Wilson held before himself as

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accuracy in matters of fact. In interpretations of the facts, however, I feel sure that Mr. Millis is a man from Mars. His mind is brilliant and honest and the severe sincerity of his approach to the problem of war is beyond question, but he has disciplined his mind to be emotionless and hence both as a matter of reason and a matter of taste he is mystified by emotional manifestations and seeks, sometimes very far afield, influences which will account for actions which were in fact produced by emotions which he declines to indulge and cannot believe that anybody ever really did indulge. Accepting the philosophy of that school of international lawyers which regards all humanitarian and ethical considerations as indeterminate and therefore irrelevant in the rough business of clashing international interests, Mr. Millis discards the obvious as unreasonable and embraces the unreasonable because it is not obvious. Such writing is an admirable discipline in the cool aftermath, but historians will have no trouble in showing that Americans as a people have persistently acted, or wanted to act, in response to just the humanitarian and ethical considerations which this school disregards. For the whole century and a half of our existence as a nation, we have meddled with and denounced and sometimes fought other people just because we were outraged by their treatment of the weak and helpless classes of their own populations. That our wars for "righteous causes" have been relatively few has perhaps been chiefly due to the physical remoteness of the oppressions which have aroused us. Surely if Armenia were as near us as Cuba, we would have fought Turkey as we did Spain.



an ideal, toward the accomplishment of which almost every sacrifice must be made, a reconstructed and better world as the result of the suffering entailed by the war, and that he saw no prospect for such a better world unless it should be under the leadership of the United States as the disinterested and common friend of all the exhausted belligerents. There were limits beyond which that patience could not go even for the attainment of that ideal. Nevertheless he remained secluded and self-controlled for several days. On a visit to Philadelphia to address a gathering of newly naturalized citizens three days after the catastrophe, he first broke his silence. Not referring directly to the *Lusitania*, he again pled for the special mission which he conceived to have been providentially set aside for America, and in the course of that address he said, "The example of America must be a special example. The example of America must be the example not merely of peace because it will not fight, but of peace because peace is the healing and elevating influence of the world and strife is not." (New Democracy, v. I, p. 321) The President's critics and a frenzied public opinion took out of that speech a single phrase, "there is such a thing as a man being too proud to fight," as being a declaration on the President's part that even such a violation of American rights as was involved in the sinking of the *Lusitania* would not take America into

the war. But those who examine the President's policy, as officially reflected in the documents, see quite clearly that the sentence belongs in its context and indicates no departure from the determination expressed in the "strict accountability" note with which the State Department had warned Germany of the inevitable consequences of the establishment of the war zone in British waters.

On May 13, 1915, the first *Lusitania* note signed by Secretary Bryan was telegraphed to Ambassador Gerard in Berlin. It adheres to the policy constantly announced and is a firm recital both of the sense of wrong and of the fixed policy of the United States in dealing with the submarine:

In view of recent acts of the German authorities in violation of American rights on the high seas which culminated in the torpedoing and sinking of the British steamship *Lusitania* on May 7, 1915, by which over 100 American citizens lost their lives, it is clearly wise and desirable that the Government of the United States and the Imperial German Government should come to a clear and full understanding as to the grave situation which has resulted.

The sinking of the British passenger steamer *Falaba* by a German submarine on March 28, through which Leon C. Thrasher, an American citizen, was drowned; the attack on April 28 on the American vessel *Cushing* by a German aëroplane; the torpedoing on May 1 of the American vessel *Gulflight* by a German submarine, as a result of which two or more American citizens met their death; and, finally, the torpedoing and sinking of



the steamship *Lusitania*, constitute a series of events which the Government of the United States has observed with growing concern, distress, and amazement.

Recalling the humane and enlightened attitude hitherto assumed by the Imperial German Government in matters of international right, and particularly with regard to the freedom of the seas; having learned to recognize the German views and the German influence in the field of international obligation as always engaged upon the side of justice and humanity; and having understood the instructions of the Imperial German Government to its naval commanders to be upon the same plane of humane action prescribed by the naval codes of other nations, the Government of the United States was loath to believe—it can not now bring itself to believe—that these acts, so absolutely contrary to the rules, the practices, and the spirit of modern warfare, could have the countenance or sanction of that great Government. It feels it to be its duty, therefore, to address the Imperial German Government concerning them with the utmost frankness and in the earnest hope that it is not mistaken in expecting action on the part of the Imperial German Government which will correct the unfortunate impressions which have been created, and vindicate once more the position of that Government with regard to the sacred freedom of the seas.

The Government of the United States has been apprised that the Imperial German Government considered themselves to be obliged by the extraordinary circumstances of the present war and the measures adopted by their adversaries in seeking to cut Germany off from all commerce, to adopt methods of retaliation



which go much beyond the ordinary methods of warfare at sea, in the proclamation of a war zone from which they have warned neutral ships to keep away. This Government has already taken occasion to inform the Imperial German Government that it can not admit the adoption of such measures or such a warning of danger to operate as in any degree an abbreviation of the rights of American ship masters or of American citizens bound on lawful errands as passengers on merchant ships of belligerent nationality; and that it must hold the Imperial German Government to a strict accountability for any infringement of those rights, intentional or incidental. It does not understand the Imperial German Government to question those rights. It assumes, on the contrary, that the Imperial Government accept, as of course, the rule that the lives of non-combatants, whether they be of neutral citizenship or citizens of one of the nations at war, can not lawfully or rightfully be put in jeopardy by the capture or destruction of an unarmed merchantman, and recognize also, as all other nations do, the obligation to take the usual precaution of visit and search to ascertain whether a suspected merchantman is in fact of belligerent nationality or is in fact carrying contraband of war under a neutral flag.

The Government of the United States, therefore, desires to call the attention of the Imperial German Government with the utmost earnestness to the fact that the objection to their present method of attack against the trade of their enemies lies in the practical impossibility of employing submarines in the destruction of commerce without disregarding those rules of fairness, reason, justice, and humanity, which all modern opin-

ion regards as imperative. It is practically impossible for the officers of a submarine to visit a merchantman at sea and examine her papers and cargo. It is practically impossible for them to make a prize of her; and, if they can not put a prize crew on board of her, they can not sink her without leaving her crew and all on board of her to the mercy of the sea in her small boats. These facts it is understood the Imperial German Government frankly admit. We are informed that, in the instances of which we have spoken, time enough for even that poor measure of safety was not given, and in at least two of the cases cited, not so much as a warning was received. Manifestly submarines can not be used against merchantmen, as the last few weeks have shown, without an inevitable violation of many sacred principles of justice and humanity.

American citizens act within their indisputable rights in taking their ships and in traveling wherever their legitimate business calls them upon the high seas, and exercise those rights in what should be the well-justified confidence that their lives will not be endangered by acts done in clear violation of universally acknowledged international obligations, and certainly in the confidence that their own Government will sustain them in the exercise of their rights.

There was recently published in the newspapers of the United States, I regret to inform the Imperial German Government, a formal warning, purporting to come from the Imperial German Embassy at Washington, addressed to the people of the United States, and stating, in effect, that any citizen of the United States who exercised his right of free travel upon the seas would do so at his peril if his journey should take him



within the zone of waters within which the Imperial German Navy was using submarines against the commerce of Great Britain and France, notwithstanding the respectful but very earnest protest of his Government, the Government of the United States. I do not refer to this for the purpose of calling the attention of the Imperial German Government at this time to the surprising irregularity of a communication from the Imperial German Embassy at Washington addressed to the people of the United States through the newspapers, but only for the purpose of pointing out that no warning that an unlawful and inhumane act will be committed can possibly be accepted as an excuse or palliation for that act or as an abatement of the responsibility for its commission.

Long acquainted as this Government has been with the character of the Imperial German Government and with the high principles of equity by which they have in the past been actuated and guided, the Government of the United States can not believe that the commanders of the vessels which committed these acts of lawlessness did so except under a misapprehension of the orders issued by the Imperial German naval authorities. It takes it for granted that, at least within the practical possibilities of every such case, the commanders even of submarines were expected to do nothing that would involve the lives of non-combatants or the safety of neutral ships, even at the cost of failing of their object of capture or destruction. It confidently expects, therefore, that the Imperial German Government will disavow the acts of which the Government of the United States complains, that they will make reparation so far as reparation is possible for injuries which are without



measure, and that they will take immediate steps to prevent the recurrence of anything so obviously subversive of the principles of warfare for which the Imperial German Government have in the past so wisely and so firmly contended.

The Government and the people of the United States look to the Imperial German Government for just, prompt, and enlightened action in this vital matter with the greater confidence because the United States and Germany are bound together not only by special ties of friendship but also by the explicit stipulations of the treaty of 1828 between the United States and the Kingdom of Prussia.

*Expressions of regret and offers of reparation in case of the destruction of neutral ships sunk by mistake, while they may satisfy international obligations, if no loss of life results, can not justify or excuse a practice, the natural and necessary effect of which is to subject neutral nations and neutral persons to new and immeasurable risks.*

*The Imperial German Government will not expect the Government of the United States to omit any word or any act necessary to the performance of its sacred duty of maintaining the rights of the United States and its citizens and of safeguarding their free exercise and enjoyment. (F.R.S., 1915, p. 393-6)*

In the foregoing I have italicized the last two paragraphs which must be emphasized in our recollection as we pursue the subsequent events. The German reply to the first *Lusitania* note dated May 28 reached the United States on May 31. The second American note sent on June 9 was signed

by Mr. Lansing, Mr. Bryan having resigned because he was unable to sign a note which he felt headed the country toward participation in the war.

The last two paragraphs of the note of June 9 are as follows:

The Government of the United States therefore very earnestly and very solemnly renews the representations of its note transmitted to the Imperial German Government on the 15th of May, and relies in these representations upon the principles of humanity, the universally recognized understandings of international law, and the ancient friendship of the German nation.

The Government of the United States can not admit that the proclamation of a war zone from which neutral ships have been warned to keep away may be made to operate as in any degree an abbreviation of the rights either of American shipmasters or of American citizens bound on lawful errands as passengers on merchant ships of belligerent nationality. It does not understand the Imperial German Government to question those rights. It understands it, also, to accept as established beyond question the principle that the lives of non-combatants can not lawfully or rightfully be put in jeopardy by the capture or destruction of an unresisting merchantman, and to recognize the obligation to take sufficient precaution to ascertain whether a suspected merchantman is in fact of belligerent nationality or is in fact carrying contraband of war under a neutral flag. The Government of the United States therefore deems it reasonable to expect that the Imperial German Government will adopt the measures necessary to



put these principles into practice in respect of the safeguarding of American lives and American ships, and asks for assurances that this will be done. (F.R.S., 1915, p. 438)

On July 8 Germany replied to the second American note, and the third American note was cabled to Germany by Secretary Lansing on July 21, 1915. It is enough to say of this correspondence that while it proceeded with the utmost dignity and restraint of expression, it relentlessly held the American view that the loss of American lives by submarine action, under the circumstances, would not only be in violation of rights which America declined to surrender, but would necessarily be regarded as "deliberately unfriendly."

On August 19, 1915, the British steamer *Arabic* was sunk and brought the United States and Germany to the brink of war. Ambassador Bernstorff applied himself with feverish activity to the problem and by October 5 was able to report to our State Department that the German Government had yielded. Instructions were reported to have been given submarine commanders not to sink merchant vessels without complying practically with the rules of cruiser warfare.

As will be later shown, President Wilson's real preoccupation throughout this whole period was his interest in the restoration of peace and the establishment of a world system in which peace would



be possible. All of his actions are, therefore, to be read with that thought in mind. The German view of the American attitude toward the submarine controversy is described as follows by Count Bernstorff:

After the first danger of war on account of the *Lusitania* and the second scare on account of the *Arabic* had passed over, the American Government believed that it could begin to work out its program. It sent the first note to England, which, according to my recollection, bore the Washington date of the 18th of October and the London date of the 5th of November, in the terms of which the English blockade was denounced as illegal and indefensible. Soon after the sending of this note, negotiations were again taken up in Washington concerning the final settlement of the *Lusitania* question, which for the third time brought us to the verge of war, because the United States demanded that we should recognize the fact that the sinking of the *Lusitania* was illegal. This word "illegal" was unconditionally rejected on our part. We almost went to war again over this word. But finally Wilson gave in on this matter, and stated that without this it would be sufficient if we should state that, while reprisals were proper (for it was as such that the sinking of the *Lusitania* was characterized), at the same time neutrals should not suffer as the result thereof, and that recourse to reprisals was only justifiable if neutrals were not injured as the result thereof. This arrangement had just been concluded, and Secretary of State Lansing and I were just about to exchange the requisite documents, when the intensive U-boat war was declared. As the

result, nothing came of this settlement of the *Lusitania* question. So it became absolutely impossible to further Wilson's greater plans to any extent.

The Chairman: The intensive U-boat war is, of course, not the ruthless U-boat war?

Witness Count v. Bernstorff: No, the intensive U-boat war was an intermediate phase whereby it was declared over here that armed merchant ships should be attacked without warning, but only armed ships. If they were armed, the principles of the unrestricted U-boat war were to be observed.

Shortly hereafter occurred the torpedoing of the *Sussex*, and as the result of this occurrence a definite agreement was entered into by both governments, the result of which was that in the future the U-boat war should be conducted according to the principles of war on commerce. (German Documents, v. I, p. 231-2)

The *Sussex* incident to which Bernstorff refers arose from the sinking of the *Sussex*, an unarmed French steamer which was torpedoed on March 24, 1916, while crossing the English Channel. This reopened the whole subject. An immediate effort was made to determine whether or not the vessel had been torpedoed or had struck a mine. Again the two countries were brought face to face with war, and on April 18 Secretary Lansing dispatched to our Ambassador in Germany a comprehensive note restating the entire case historically and practically issuing an ultimatum to the German Government. The following paragraphs from that note are especially significant:



(2) Information now in the possession of the Government of the United States fully establishes the facts in the case of the *Sussex*, and the inferences which my Government has drawn from that information it regards as confirmed by the circumstances set forth in your excellency's note of the 10th instant. On the 24th of March 1916, at about 2:50 o'clock in the afternoon, the unarmed steamer *Sussex*, with 325 or more passengers on board, among whom were a number of American citizens, was torpedoed while crossing from Folkestone to Dieppe. The *Sussex* had never been armed; was a vessel known to be habitually used only for the conveyance of passengers across the English Channel; and was not following the route taken by troopships or supply ships. About 80 of her passengers, non-combatants of all ages and sexes, including citizens of the United States, were killed or injured.

(4) The Government of the United States, after having given careful consideration to the note of the Imperial Government of the 10th of April, regrets to state that the impression made upon it by the statements and proposals contained in that note is that the Imperial Government has failed to appreciate the gravity of the situation which has resulted, not alone from the attack on the *Sussex*, but from the whole method and character of submarine warfare as disclosed by the unrestrained practice of the commanders of German undersea craft during the past twelvemonth and more in the indiscriminate destruction of merchant vessels of all sorts, nationalities, and destinations. If the sinking of the *Sussex* had been an isolated case, the Government of the United States might find it possible to hope that the officer who was responsible for that act had



wilfully violated his orders or had been criminally negligent in taking none of the precautions they prescribed, and that the ends of justice might be satisfied by imposing upon him an adequate punishment, coupled with a formal disavowal of the act and payment of a suitable indemnity by the Imperial Government. But, though the attack upon the *Sussex* was manifestly indefensible and caused a loss of life so tragical as to make it stand forth as one of the most terrible examples of the inhumanity of submarine warfare as the commanders of German vessels are conducting it, it unhappily does not stand alone.

(5) On the contrary, the Government of the United States is forced by recent events to conclude that it is only one instance, even though one of the most extreme and most distressing instances, of the deliberate method and spirit of indiscriminate destruction of merchant vessels of all sorts, nationalities, and destinations which have become more and more unmistakable as the activity of German undersea vessels of war has in recent months been quickened and extended.

(10) The Government of the United States has been very patient. At every stage of this distressing experience of tragedy after tragedy it has sought to be governed by the most thoughtful consideration of the extraordinary circumstances of an unprecedented war and to be guided by sentiments of very genuine friendship for the people and Government of Germany. It has accepted the successive explanations and assurances of the Imperial Government as, of course, given in entire sincerity and good faith, and has hoped, even against hope, that it would prove to be possible for the Imperial Government so to order and control the acts

of its naval commanders as to square its policy with the recognized principles of humanity as embodied in the law of nations. It has made every allowance for unprecedented conditions and has been willing to wait until the facts became unmistakable and were susceptible of only one interpretation.

(11) It now owes it to a just regard for its own rights to say to the Imperial Government that that time has come. It has become painfully evident to it that the position which it took at the very outset is inevitable, namely, the use of submarines for the destruction of an enemy's commerce is, of necessity, because of the very character of the vessels employed and the very methods of attack which their employment of course involves, utterly incompatible with the principles of humanity, the long-established and incontrovertible rights of neutrals, and the sacred immunities of non-combatants.

(12) If it is still the purpose of the Imperial Government to prosecute relentless and indiscriminate warfare against vessels of commerce by the use of submarines without regard to what the Government of the United States must consider the sacred and indisputable rules of international law and the universally recognized dictates of humanity, the Government of the United States is at last forced to the conclusion that there is but one course it can pursue. Unless the Imperial Government should now immediately declare and effect an abandonment of its present methods of submarine warfare against passenger and freight-carrying vessels, the Government of the United States can have no choice but to sever diplomatic relations with the German Empire altogether. This action the Govern-

ment of the United States contemplates with the greatest reluctance but feels constrained to take in behalf of humanity and the rights of neutral nations.<sup>20</sup>

Omitting intervening conversations and notes, it is sufficient to say that on May 4, 1916, the Secretary of State in Washington received the German reply to our note of April 18 definitely promising on behalf of the German Government that merchant vessels both "within and without the area declared as naval war zone, shall not be sunk without warning and without saving human lives, unless these ships attempt to escape or offer resistance." (F.R.S., 1916, p. 259)

<sup>20</sup> "Foreign Relations," 1916, Supplement, p. 232-4. Hereinafter referred to as F. R. S., 1916.



## CHAPTER VI

1916

THE year 1916 thus opened with the submarine question brought to a standstill. It had been the only threatening question in German-American relations, although Count von Bernstorff's statement to the Second Sub-Committee on October 22, 1919, reminds us not to forget that throughout the whole period of our neutrality the Belgian question was a dominant one in American public opinion. He said:

Throughout the entire war, the Belgian question was the one which interested Americans most and which was most effective in working up American public opinion against us. Up to the time of the *Lusitania*, there was absolutely nothing else in the entire mass of anti-German propaganda in America, except what bore upon Belgium. (German Documents, v. I, p. 253-4)

In the same connection, Count von Bernstorff refers to "so-called German conspiracies in the United States" as incidents which prejudicially affected his diplomatic negotiations and his efforts to quiet the growth of sentiment hostile to Germany.

It is thus clear that from May 4, 1916, German-American relations continued to improve. They were adversely affected by the irritation arising

from the "conspiracies" referred to by Bernstorff and American opinion was aroused by the so-called "deportations" from Belgium which created a distinctly unfavorable impression here and delayed the initiation of peace proposals by President Wilson. It is not too much to say, however, that from May 1916 until the declaration of the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare, there was nothing in German-American relations which promised serious trouble, and we shall see that this improving situation was not only recognized by Germany but eagerly acted upon by Germany in efforts made by her Government to initiate peace proposals through President Wilson.

The case was far otherwise throughout this year with the relations between the United States and Great Britain. In October 1915 Secretary Lansing had addressed to the British Government a long and carefully argued résumé of all the controversies between the two governments growing out of the actions of Great Britain infringing upon our trading rights as a neutral. No international lawyer could have written a more intelligent or scholarly review of the accepted principles of international law. No responsible American official could have stated with more firmness or finality the intention of the United States not to waive its rights or concede any invasion of them by the actions of Great Britain held to be illegal and unjustifiable. The



last four paragraphs of that note summarize both its complaints and the spirit of its protest:

(33) I believe it has been conclusively shown that the methods sought to be employed by Great Britain to obtain and use evidence of enemy destination of cargoes bound for neutral ports, and to impose a contraband character upon such cargoes, are without justification; that the blockade, upon which such methods are partly founded, is ineffective, illegal, and indefensible; that the judicial procedure offered as a means of reparation for an international injury is inherently defective for the purpose; and that in many cases jurisdiction is asserted in violation of the law of nations. The United States, therefore, can not submit to the curtailment of its neutral rights by these measures, which are admittedly retaliatory, and therefore illegal, in conception and in nature, and intended to punish the enemies of Great Britain for alleged illegalities on their part. The United States might not be in a position to object to them if its interests and the interests of all neutrals were unaffected by them, but, being affected, it can not with complacency suffer further subordination of its rights and interests to the plea that the exceptional geographic position of the enemies of Great Britain require or justify oppressive and illegal practices.

(34) The Government of the United States desires, therefore, to impress most earnestly upon His Majesty's Government that it must insist that the relations between it and His Majesty's Government be governed, not by a policy of expediency, but by those established rules of international conduct upon which Great Britain in the past has held the United States to account when the latter nation was a belligerent engaged in a struggle



for national existence. It is of the highest importance to neutrals, not only of the present day, but of the future, that the principles of international right be maintained unimpaired.

(35) This task of championing the integrity of neutral rights, which have received the sanction of the civilized world, against the lawless conduct of belligerents arising out of the bitterness of the great conflict which is now wasting the countries of Europe, the United States unhesitatingly assumes, and to the accomplishment of that task it will devote its energies, exercising always that impartiality which from the outbreak of the war it has sought to exercise in its relations with the warring nations. (F.R.S., 1915, p. 589)<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Secretary Lansing in his "War Memoirs" says:

"I did all that I could to prolong the disputes by preparing, or having prepared, long and detailed replies, and introducing technical and controversial matters in the hope that before the extended interchange of arguments came to an end something would happen to change the current of American public opinion or to make the American people perceive that German absolutism was a menace to their liberties and to democratic institutions everywhere. Fortunately this hope and effort were not in vain." (p. 112)

"The notes that were sent were long and exhaustive treatises which opened up new subjects of discussion rather than closing those in controversy. Short and emphatic notes were dangerous. Everything was submerged in verbosity. It was done with deliberate purpose. It insured continuance of the controversies and left the questions unsettled, which was necessary in order to leave this country free to act and even to act illegally when it entered the war." (p. 128)

The long, diffuse and argumentative notes to the British Foreign Office were, therefore, a part of a plan in the Secretary's mind not to allow our controversies with the British to come to a head. On the basis of these statements and particularly the statement made on page 128 of his Memoirs that "there was always in my mind the conviction that we would ultimately become an ally of Great Britain and that it would not do, therefore, to let our controversies reach a point where diplomatic correspondence gave place to action," the question has been raised as to whether Secretary Lansing was really pursuing the policy which President Wilson desired to be pursued with entire loyalty. Of this I personally think there can be no doubt. The President did not want to break with either the Allies or the Central Powers, and while

The body of the note from which the above paragraphs are quoted dealt with the detention of American vessels and cargoes, the so-called blockade established by the British Orders in Council of March 1915, and British Prize Court procedure, which Secretary Lansing assured the British Government the United States had no intention of accepting as the judge of the rights of its citizens.

Early in 1916, a fresh controversy grew up from the treatment of United States mail in ships to neutral European countries. The correspondence on this subject dragged over months, interweaving with a similar controversy about the British black list and bunker coal control. Throughout the whole year, Secretary Lansing's patience was tried, but his thoroughly American attitude never wavered, and as late as September 1916 we find him writing to the President advising the sending of a telegram to the British Government, which, though in diplomatic phrases, was a sharp warning that American patience had about reached the limit:

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he wanted the State Department to store up the record of all our violated rights for later adjustment, he very distinctly did not want our controversies of those rights to lead to ultimatums. We shall see later that when Secretary Lansing did recommend a peremptory tone to Great Britain, the President declined to follow his advice and preferred to send verbal messages to the British through Ambassador Page. While I have no knowledge of the fact and know of no record on the subject, I have not the least doubt that Secretary Lansing repeatedly told President Wilson, when he presented his long and argumentative notes for his consideration, that he was deliberately prolonging the correspondence but at the same time omitting no assertion of our claims.



The British Government appears not to comprehend the fact, for it is a fact, that they are really forcing this Government into a position which cannot but result in strained relations between the two countries. The temper of the American people is now so aroused over the attitude and practices of the Allies, that I fear the consequences unless there is some recession on their part. The black list and the mail censorship are the matters which are most in the minds of the American people—particularly so because the annoyance to individuals is so intimate and so general. I anticipate, therefore, that in the near future this Government, however reluctantly, will be forced by the strength of public opinion to take steps to put the retaliatory legislation of Congress into effect. (*Maritime Commerce*, v. II, p. 525)

This message was not sent, because at the time the President was already deeply concerned with a program of peace proposals which he had for some months been endeavoring to work out. In acknowledging the receipt of the paper from Secretary Lansing, the President told him that he thought it inadvisable to send the message and unnecessary in view of the conversation he had just had with Ambassador Page, who was then in this country. The full statement of the President on that subject is especially interesting because the presidential campaign was at its height and the reference to it is significant:

I had a talk with Walter Page of the most explicit kind, and am sure that he will be able to convey to the



powers that be in London a very clear impression of the lamentable and dangerous mistakes they are making. I covered the whole subject matter here dealt with in a way which I am sure left nothing to be desired in the way of explicitness or firmness of tone; and I think that our method had better stop with that for the time being. Let us forget the campaign so far as matters of this sort are concerned. (Maritime Commerce, v. II, p. 526)

It is impossible to read the departmental or diplomatic correspondence of this period without coming to the conclusion that from May 4, 1916, to February 1917, American relations with the Allies were much worse than they were with the Central Powers. Our Government and our citizens had multiple and just grounds for complaint against both sets of belligerents. That none of these complaints had been permitted to provoke us to hostilities was due to the wisdom, patience, and firmness of the President. The course he elected to follow was chosen both because of his overwhelming desire to keep America at peace in response to what he knew to be the sentiment of the American people, and also because of his devotion to the ideals of America as a peacemaker and of a better world as a result of the war.

It is now helpful to consider the situation at the end of 1916 and the beginning of 1917.

I have referred several times to the fact that with the improvement of American-German relations

after May 4, 1916, the German Government began to turn its mind toward peace proposals. The correspondence between the German Foreign Office and Ambassador Bernstorff is curiously complex and mystifying. Bernstorff had fully communicated to his Government the desire of President Wilson to be the peacemaker. Whenever the German Government felt a fresh flush of confidence in its ability to win the war, the attitude of its responsible officials toward this disposition of the President was one of contempt. Whenever the German military situation looked bad, the German Foreign Office recurred to the President's desire and sought to make use of it. Ambassador Bernstorff, throughout this whole period, was in constant, intimate, and confidential communication with Colonel House and in the fall of 1916, acting under instructions from his Government, he pressed Colonel House to urge the President to initiate peace proposals. The pendency of the presidential election in the United States, the so-called deportations from Belgium, and certain of the so-called "conspiracies" from time to time made an unfavorable atmosphere for the initiation of such action by the President, but in December 1916 the President addressed to all the contending parties an identical note asking a statement of war aims from each. The replies, while unsatisfactory, did not close the door and accordingly the President addressed the Senate of



the United States on January 22, 1917, and set forth what he regarded as the essential terms of peace in Europe. In the course of that address he referred to the answers received by the State Department to his note of December 18, and then said:

... The Central Powers united in a reply which stated merely that they were ready to meet their antagonists in conference to discuss terms of peace. The Entente Powers have replied much more definitely and have stated, in general terms, indeed, but with sufficient definiteness to imply details, the arrangements, guarantees, and acts of reparation which they deem to be the indispensable conditions of a satisfactory settlement. We are that much nearer a definite discussion of the peace which shall end the present war. We are that much nearer the discussion of the international concert which must thereafter hold the world at peace. In every discussion of the peace that must end this war it is taken for granted that that peace must be followed by some definite concert of power which will make it virtually impossible that any such catastrophe should ever overwhelm us again. Every lover of mankind, every sane and thoughtful man must take that for granted. (New Democracy, v. II, p. 407)

Proceeding to state the disinterested but lofty aspirations of America to be permitted to play a part in the great enterprise of a constructive peace, the President then outlined the general terms upon which the termination of the war should be sought as a prelude to the great constructive undertaking. He said as to the terms:



They imply, first of all, that it must be a peace without victory. It is not pleasant to say this. I beg that I may be permitted to put my own interpretation upon it and that it may be understood that no other interpretation was in my thought. I am seeking only to face realities and to face them without soft concealments. Victory would mean peace forced upon the loser, a victor's terms imposed upon the vanquished. It would be accepted in humiliation, under duress, at an intolerable sacrifice, and would leave a sting, a resentment, a bitter memory upon which terms of peace would rest, not permanently, but only as upon quicksand. Only a peace between equals can last. Only a peace the very principle of which is equality and a common participation in a common benefit. The right state of mind, the right feeling between nations, is as necessary for a lasting peace as is the just settlement of vexed questions of territory or of racial and national allegiance. (New Democracy, v. II, p. 410)

The address <sup>22</sup> is lofty in tone and noble in purpose and was a practical invitation to the belligerents to see and appreciate the spirit in which America sought to be the friend, indeed the servant, of the high cause toward which both sides professed themselves to be devoted.

In Germany, meantime, a most subtle game was being played. The German Government desired President Wilson's intervention to be effective only up to the point of getting representatives of the belligerents to sit down and talk with one another

<sup>22</sup> For full text see Appendix, p. 167.

about prospects of peace, but it very distinctly did not want President Wilson, or any representative of America, to participate in the conference. In other words, the situation was the typical one of a country which desires to achieve its own objects by direct and coercive conference rather than of a nation which is frankly seeking a reasonable composition. All the documents which bear out this statement are published in the hearings of the Second Sub-Committee. Bernstorff's instructions, constantly reiterated, were to press President Wilson to start negotiations, but they were equally positive that he should do nothing which committed the German Government beyond a willingness to face their adversaries in direct conversation. Through Colonel House, Bernstorff finally secured a definite statement that President Wilson had no desire to take any part in determining territorial or purely European questions, but that he did desire to have a voice in determining the peace structure which was to be set up when the war was over. With this assurance, the German Foreign Office continued to press Bernstorff to promote the President's activity and when the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare was actually announced, nobody was more surprised than Bernstorff, who was still acting under the belief that his Government desired success in the peace negotiations and was entirely satisfied with the terms upon which those suggestions were

to be made and the progress with which they were being advanced.

We learn from both Ludendorff<sup>23</sup> and Hindenburg<sup>24</sup> that that question of the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare had been pressed on the attention of the High Command from August 1916. Bethmann-Hollweg was consistently opposed to it. The Supreme Military Command felt that the question was a thoroughly practical one and that its answer could only be given by the naval authorities. If such a campaign would certainly, and in a relatively short time, force England to capitulate, then it ought to be resorted to. If the navy could not guarantee that result, the danger of bringing neutral countries into the war was too great to be assumed. The discussion was adjourned from time to time, but in December Ludendorff made a tour of the entire front and returned profoundly pessimistic. At his instance Hindenburg sent a memorandum to the Chancellor urging that unless quite definite assurances could be secured of President Wilson's success in peace proposals, radical steps would have to be taken. On January 9, 1917, the Emperor held a council at Pless. The navy practically guaranteed the success of the submarine. The High Military Command joined in urging its adoption and the Chancellor yielded.

<sup>23</sup> "Ludendorff's Own Story," Harper, 1919, v. I, p. 371, *et seq.*

<sup>24</sup> "Out of My Life," Hindenburg, Harper, 1921, v. II, p. 41, *et seq.*



## CHAPTER VII

### THE BREAK WITH GERMANY

GERMANY'S decision was thus taken. In advance Bernstorff summarized the whole American situation in a statement to the Foreign Office, dated December 11, 1916, which said, among other things:

With regard to the question of submarine warfare the American Press are quite unanimous on one point, that a withdrawal of the assurances given by Germany after the *Sussex* incident, or even an intentional breach of these, is bound to bring about, as it were, automatically, a breaking-off of diplomatic relations with Germany; and it is also clear that such a rupture would only be the first step towards open war. (Bernstorff, p. 340-1)

In a dispatch to the Foreign Office dated January 14, 1917, Bernstorff said:

Ever since the Presidential election the political situation here has not changed. Apart from the question of ending the world-war, the public mind has not been constantly or earnestly concerned with any matter....

Meanwhile, the attitude towards ourselves, which after the *Sussex* incident took a decided turn for the good, has slowly improved. (Bernstorff, p. 354-6)

On January 19 Bernstorff received official notice from his government that unrestricted submarine

warfare would begin again on February 1. He says in his memoirs with regard to this notice:

On the 19th of January I received official notice that the unrestricted U-boat campaign would begin on February 1st, and I was to give the American Government notice accordingly on the evening of the 31st January. After all that had happened, I could but regard this intimation as a declaration of war against the United States, and one which, in addition, put us in the wrong; because it put an end to the peace overtures made by Mr. Wilson, which had been started with our approval. I did my utmost to try to get the Berlin resolution cancelled, or at least to obtain a postponement of the date on which it was to come into force, and with this end in view I sent the following telegram to Berlin:

#### CIPHER TELEGRAM

Washington, 19th January, 1917.

War inevitable in view of the proposed action. Danger of rupture could be mitigated by the fixing of a definite interval of time, say one month, so that neutral vessels and passengers may be spared, as any preliminary and timely warning seems impossible if present programme is carried out. I shall have to give the password for unnavigable German steamers on February 1st, as effect of carrying out of my instructions here will be like declaration of war, and strict guard will be kept. In any case an incident like that of the *Lusitania* may be expected soon.

If military reasons are not absolutely imperative, in view of my Telegram 212, postponement most urgently desirable. Wilson believes he can obtain peace

on the basis of our proposed equal rights of all nations. House told me again yesterday, that Wilson proposed to take action very shortly, for in view of our declaration regarding future Peace League, etc., he regards prospects of a Peace Conference as favorable. (Bernstorff, p. 358-9)

Later when Bernstorff had returned to Germany, and the question of the propriety or necessity of the declaration of unrestricted submarine warfare in the middle of promising peace negotiations arose, Bernstorff heard from both the Chancellor and Helfferich statements to the effect that they regarded the President's speech to the Congress of January 22 as favoring the Allies in the statement of the war aims from America's point of view. He himself took no such view of the President's address but very frankly said that he regarded the opinion of the Foreign Office on that subject, as later expressed, as merely a convenient fable.

Nor is Bernstorff unsupported in his views as to the state of public opinion in America and the promising character, as well as the sincerity, of the President's peace activities. Haniel, at that time Counsellor of the German Embassy in Washington, wrote to the German General Headquarters a comprehensive letter which fully sustains the observations and reports of Bernstorff. After discussing the relative quieting down of American opinion, Haniel says:



There is one point on which we must be absolutely clear. A withdrawal from, or even a material limitation of, the exercise of the so-called concession which we made to the United States this spring in connection with the U-boat war, means war with the United States—and therewith probably also war with Holland and others, which otherwise would be starved out. This is the absolute conviction of all those here who have paid any attention to the question, and this includes those who were formerly inclined to a different view. No government and no party would venture, without committing political suicide, to give in to Germany on this question, which is one involving the lives of American citizens, after America has so definitely announced what it considers its international rights. The national feeling has risen to such a pitch during the war, and public opinion has become so hysterically sensitive as the result of the continually recurring incidents, exchanges of notes, and proddings by the press, that neither one of them will be able to bear any further burdens of this nature.

A revocation of our promises would be immediately followed by the diplomatic break. Our warnings would not be observed, and the death of an American as the result of a U-boat attack would result in a declaration of war. It is certain that the majority of the people in the country desire to see that peace maintained which gave an impulse to the country which it had never dreamed of, and they are grateful to Wilson because "he kept us out of war." But let the diplomatic breach occur, and the pressure will be too strong. Even the most zealous apostles of peace would not be able to endure the reproach that, by breaking off diplomatic relations,

they had in a sense given Germany a license to kill all Americans in the future. (German Documents, v. II, p. 869-70)

Even as late as January 29, twenty days after the decision at Pless, Bethmann-Hollweg was telegraphing Bernstorff, "Please thank the President on behalf of the Imperial Government for his communication. We trust him completely and beg him to trust us likewise."

It is perhaps not fair to call this apparent double dealing by any particularly harsh names. The German Government wanted peace on its own terms. It had two strings to its bow: the proposals initiated by President Wilson, if they could be jockeyed into a situation which would bring the representatives of the belligerents face to face to make their own trade; and second, unrestricted submarine warfare, if the navy could promise success before the threatened collapse of the army on the western front which General Ludendorff had come to fear. Both of these alternatives were pursued until finally the fatal day, determined upon at Pless, arrived. The peace negotiations were then definitely abandoned and Germany's fate was permitted to depend upon the ruthless use of the submarine.

On January 31, Bernstorff presented the official communication announcing the resumption of submarine warfare to the State Department. Before

doing so he gave orders that the engines of all German ships lying in American harbors should be destroyed. On February 3, President Wilson announced to a joint session of the two houses of Congress the rupture of diplomatic relations with Germany and handed the German Ambassador his passport.<sup>25</sup> From February 3 until April 6 war remained undeclared but certain upon the arising of an appropriate incident. Bernstorff's comment upon this whole situation is interesting, both as showing his own judgment, and as expressing the opinion of Colonel House with whom he remained in intimate and confidential relations until he left the country:

... Furthermore, not only I myself, but almost all those gentlemen who returned with me to Germany, had the feeling, on reaching home, that we in America had formed a much clearer notion of the true state of Germany, than those of our fellow-countrymen who had been living at home; for they had been completely cut off from the world by the Blockade. After we had seen the conditions prevailing in Germany, we could understand even less than we had before, why the Imperial Government had not snatched with joy at the chance of making peace.

As to the question whether we should have obtained an acceptable and tolerable peace through Mr. Wilson's efforts, I am still firmly convinced today, that this would have been the case. The President would not

<sup>25</sup> For the full text of President Wilson's address see Appendix, p. 174.



have offered to mediate if he had not been able to reckon with certainty upon success, and he was better situated than any German, to know the attitude of the Entente. In his farewell letter to me, Mr. House wrote :

“It is too sad that your Government should have declared the unrestricted U-boat war at a moment when we were so near to peace. The day will come when people in Germany will see how much you have done for your country in America.” (Bernstorff, p. 382)

Those who have some special theory to advance, and particularly those who have not examined, in the documents, the history of this period, may continue to indulge doubts as to what caused America's entry into the war; but those who have examined the documents and who approach the problem with a judicial attitude can reach but one conclusion. America from the outbreak of the war had declined to yield to any aggression upon its rights as a neutral which involved the loss of American lives. It had shown, through more than two years, forbearance and patience in dealing with scattered instances of such violations of its rights, but had never left room for doubt that the declaration of a policy not to regard those rights would force the country to war. Germany took the decision at Pless, not to break the Allied blockade of Germany, but to crush England. Excuses, sometimes given later, and home consumption propaganda in Germany at

the time, to the effect that the Germans were suffering for food by reason of the Allied blockade are, as Bernstorff said, "a mere convenient fable."<sup>26</sup>

The Second Sub-Committee examined this whole question and its reports are conclusive. The VIII Conclusion of the report is as follows:

1. In the general situation which was brought about by the peace move of Wilson in the winter of 1916-17, certain conditions existed which made it possible to reach the point of peace parleys. The Imperial Government did not avail itself of these possibilities.

2. The reasons why the above-named opportunities were not taken advantage of are to be found in the resolution regarding the commencement of the unrestricted U-boat warfare of January 9, 1917. (German Documents, v. I, p. 150)

The whole report of the Second Sub-Committee is of deep interest. On page 146 it is said:

If we seek to inquire into the causes of Germany's failure to take advantage of the situation brought about by the Wilson move, in order to reach a peace of understanding, the only answer that can be given, based on the material made available by official documents and hearings, is that the desire to end the war through a victory brought about by an unrestricted U-boat war eliminated the possibility of peace so far as Germany was concerned.

After characterizing the Pless decision as a mistake largely based upon a memorandum by a Heidel-

<sup>26</sup> See "American Neutrality, 1914-1917," Charles Seymour, Yale University Press, 1935, p. 58, *et seq.*



berg professor, "who, by no means, could be considered as an authority of particularly high standing with regard to any question of world commerce or politics," the report decides that the mistake was based upon erroneous estimates, as follows:

1. The assumptions, from the commercial aspect, of a successful U-boat warfare were erroneously entertained, and especially was the commercial assistance on the part of America underestimated.

2. The terrifying effect upon neutral shipping did not reach the extent that it had been assumed would be reached.

3. Sufficient weight was not given to the effect of measures of a military and technical kind which were taken against the carrying on of an unrestricted U-boat warfare.

4. The military resources of the United States as an ally were fundamentally underestimated.

5. The military participation of America in the war in the shape of extensive troop transportation was hardly taken into consideration on account of the belief that the U-boats would be able to stop these transports even if transportation were attempted.

6. The question as to how far the military and commercial equipment of Germany would continue to be sufficient was limited to a consideration of the immediate future, but was not examined from the standpoint that peace might not have been obtained in the summer of 1917, and that, through the entrance of the United States into the War, it could be dragged out for a considerable length of time, and the issues thereof become more acute. (p. 147)



The blame for the German decision is put squarely upon German authorities, who are held by the report to have known exactly what they were doing and what the inevitable consequences would be so far as involvement with the United States is concerned. Ambassador Bernstorff was right when he said that the decision at Pless was in effect a declaration of war against the United States. That he recognized it as such could not be proved more conclusively than by the statement he issued to the press on February 3 after he received his passports: "I am not surprised. My government will not be surprised either. The people in Berlin knew what was bound to happen if they took the action they have taken. There was nothing else left for the United States to do."<sup>27</sup>

I should perhaps remind the reader parenthetically that throughout the period from August 1914 to March 1916, I lived in Cleveland, had no official connection of any kind with national affairs, and had only the access to knowledge common to interested citizens generally. I became Secretary of War on March 7, 1916, and in addition to the task of familiarizing myself with the personnel and routine of the War Department, was immediately plunged into the difficulties occasioned by the Mexican border troubles. The sinking of the *Sussex* on March 24 was my first sharp reminder of the

<sup>27</sup> "War Memoirs of Robert Lansing," Bobbs-Merrill, 1935, p. 217.

possibility of trouble between the United States and Germany. The definite promise of the discontinuance of unrestricted submarine warfare given on May 4 quieted the situation and throughout the rest of that year I do not recall any acute anxiety on the part of either the President or members of the Cabinet with regard to American-German relations. With Secretary Lansing and various members of the State Department, I recall frequent conversations about the increasing trade restrictions imposed by the Allies, and on two or three occasions members of the Cabinet, led by Secretary Lansing, took strong ground in favor of embargoes, reprisals, convoying of American merchantmen, or other steps to protect America's trade rights as a neutral. In general, the atmosphere of all these discussions was made by the President, whose determination to keep the country out of war was fixed. This policy was not only accepted, but heartily approved, so far as I know, by every member of the Cabinet. Temporary irritations were always allayed by a few sentences from the President recalling to our minds the great ideals of policy which he was so constantly explaining both to the Congress and to the people of the country.

The preparedness campaign was distinctly not directed at any adversary. In the War Department it led to attempts to expand our capacity for rapid production of munitions in the event of need, but

the modesty of the War Department program, and the far greater modesty of the response of Congress to our request for appropriations, quite convincingly prove that neither the Administration nor the Congress intended that we should go into the war, nor believed it very likely that we would be compelled to do so. The National Defense Act, passed shortly after I went to Washington, contemplated preparation by five annual increments of increase in the Regular Army, so that our preparation for war was really based upon a "five year plan."



## CHAPTER VIII

# OUR DOMESTIC WELFARE WHILE NEUTRAL

**W**HEN the World War broke out in August 1914, I was mayor of Cleveland, a city of approximately 750,000 inhabitants of whom it was said that 75 percent were either foreign born or the children of foreign born parents. There were representatives of every European race and nation. The Germans numbered approximately 80,000, and of the Hungarians, Italians, and Central and South European Slavs there were colonies of even larger numbers. Many of these groups of people were segregated and lived in great districts where the language of their homeland continued to be spoken and ancient customs observed, their racial songs sung, and their churches and newspapers observed and perpetuated the traditions of the countries from which they had come.

On the day war was declared, I sent for the Chief of Police and said to him: "The racial antagonism and bitterness of this war in Europe will inevitably affect our people and we are likely to have the war in miniature in our streets." I accordingly asked him to instruct all officers of the police force to be watchful and conciliatory, and to approach any people whom they found discussing the

European war and tell them that the war was being fought out in Europe and that we could neither help nor hinder either side, our duty being, so far as we could, to keep ourselves calm and the city's life sound and wholesome. The Chief of Police smiled at my naïveté and said: "Mr. Mayor, I will, of course, do what you suggest, but there will be no trouble here. Most of these people came from Europe to escape the very thing now going on there and their chief emotion will be thankfulness that they have escaped it and are not involved." He added, smilingly: "At the end of a year from now, the reports of the Police Department will show more arrests for disorders growing out of the christening of babies than out of discussions of the issues of the European war." About a year later the Chief of Police recalled that conversation and brought me the figures. His forecast had been verified. Apparently the festivities connected with the christenings had led to fights and disorder somewhat generally, but I do not recall that there had been a single international quarrel.

I tell this incident not because I believe our country to have been wholly free from divided sympathies which sometimes led to disorder and violence, but because both my experience and my reading have convinced me that during the period of our neutrality, American citizens of foreign birth, and to a very substantial extent foreigners



resident but not naturalized in the United States, were loyal and law abiding.

It must be remembered, however, that one of the constant anxieties of those responsible for the maintenance of American neutrality grew out of the fact that the feelings of our people were put under the harrow of conflicting propaganda. The extent to which the agencies attempting to create pro-Ally and pro-German sentiment were organized and maintained by European countries is perhaps even yet not fully known. Each side, believing its own cause to be just and recognizing the importance of imponderables, naturally sought to impress the people of the greatest and most powerful of the neutral countries with its point of view, both about its own purposes and about the ambitions and misconduct of its adversaries. This has always been true, to a greater or less extent, and will be increasingly true in the future. A "decent respect for the opinion of mankind" will compel every belligerent nation to state its case as persuasively as it can, and, in the modern world, means of communication have been so perfected that the people of any important neutral country must expect to be argued with and informed, or misinformed, from day to day by those who are struggling for their lives and realize that sympathy if aroused can take a helpful, if not controlling, part in the ultimate outcome of their struggle.



The Allies started with certain great advantages. With Great Britain we had a common language and shared great institutional and historical traditions. For so much of the German philosophy of life as we understood, we had a settled dislike. The war seemed to have been started by Germany and to fulfil an expectation we had long held with foreboding. The denunciation of the treaty guaranteeing respect for the territorial integrity of Belgium as "a scrap of paper," the invasion of Belgium, and the reports of the ruthlessness with which that invasion was carried out, all necessarily put the apologists for Germany on the defensive. There was, of course, no occasion for the Entente Powers to complain of the operation of our neutrality since their command of the seas made it wholly beneficial to them. On the other hand the Central Powers, cut off from access to our commercial and industrial resources, while recognizing the complete legality of America's overseas trade, including the shipment of arms and munitions, were nevertheless aware of the fact that our country was a sustaining storehouse of supplies for their adversaries.

Sir Cecil Spring Rice realized from the beginning both that Americans were impatient of being preached at and also that the advantages of the Allies automatically created propaganda for them. Accordingly he discouraged deliberate efforts on the part of the Allies to set up agencies of propa-

ganda in the United States. I have already quoted from some of his letters and dispatches on this subject. Undoubtedly every favorable item in the Allied press was brought to the attention of American editors and a few men of distinction from the Allied countries came to America to explain their case. How just they were either as to their own conduct, or that of their adversaries, depended, no doubt, upon the temperaments of the speakers and the sources of their information. In general, Allied propaganda does not seem to have gone beyond an exposition of this sort, although some Americans eminent in the country's life were Pro-Ally and were fervent in the public advocacy of their own opinions, a fervor which was not discouraged by the official representatives of Allied countries accredited to the United States.

The German case was far different. When the President read his War Message to Congress on April 2, 1917, he reviewed the disturbance of our domestic life by representatives, voluntary or official, of the Central Powers in these words:

One of the things that has served to convince us that the Prussian autocracy was not and could never be our friend is that from the very outset of the present war it has filled our unsuspecting communities and even our offices of government with spies and set criminal intrigues everywhere afoot against our national unity of counsel, our peace within and without, our industries



and our commerce. Indeed it is now evident that its spies were here even before the war began; and it is unhappily not a matter of conjecture but a fact proved in our courts of justice that the intrigues which have more than once come perilously near to disturbing the peace and dislocating the industries of the country have been carried on at the instigation, with the support, and even under the personal direction of official agents of the Imperial Government accredited to the Government of the United States. Even in checking these things and trying to extirpate them we have sought to put the most generous interpretation possible upon them because we knew that their source lay, not in any hostile feeling or purpose of the German people towards us (who were, no doubt, as ignorant of them as we ourselves were), but only in the selfish designs of a Government that did what it pleased and told its people nothing. But they have played their part in serving to convince us at last that that Government entertains no real friendship for us and means to act against our peace and security at its convenience. That it means to stir up enemies against us at our very doors the intercepted note to the German Minister at Mexico City is eloquent evidence.<sup>28</sup>

Ambassador Bernstorff in his "My Three Years in America" deals with the "so-called German conspiracies" and enumerates twenty-four separate instances, many of which he attributes to spontaneous and misdirected zeal on the part of German sympathizers and in most of which he declares himself

<sup>28</sup> For full text see Appendix, p. 183.



to have been wholly without participation. The twenty-four conspiracies enumerated include widespread falsification of passports; the attempted destruction of the Welland Canal; the attempt to bring about a revolution in India, engineered from the United States; plots to destroy munition ships by incendiary bombs and infernal machines; the fomenting of strikes in American factories and among American dock workers; and the operation of spies in American industrial and commercial establishments. The German Government naturally recognized the unwisdom of participation in undertakings of this kind by its diplomatic representative in the United States and accordingly sent over special agents to operate in its behalf who reported directly to Berlin and not to the Embassy in Washington. These especially accredited agents and some of the consular representatives of Germany in the United States very definitely took part in conspiracies of the sort mentioned, and it was, of course, quite clearly established that the military and naval attachés in the German Embassy, Captains von Papen and Boy-Ed, were involved in many of them. In a personally defensive statement Bernstorff says:

Such offences against the laws of America as were actually committed were certainly reprobated by none more sincerely than by myself, if only because nothing could be imagined more certain to militate against my

policy, as I have here described it, than these outrages and the popular indignation aroused by them. I fully realized that these individual acts in defiance of the law of the land and the resulting spread of Germanophobia, were bound to damage me in the eyes of the United States Government and public opinion. It is thus obviously absurd to accuse me of being responsible in any way for the acts in question, seeing that any such instigation, or even approval on my part, would have involved the utter ruin of my own policy! (p. 107-8)

. . . I may observe, however, that I more than once urgently requested the Foreign Office to use all their influence against the dispatch of Secret Service men to America. (p. 109)

The extent of these conspiracies was made a matter of record by the Sub-Committee of the Committee on Judiciary of the Senate, which in September 1918 undertook an investigation of the whole subject.<sup>29</sup> The accusations against the brewing and liquor interests grew out of the prohibition question and are immaterial here. We may likewise disregard the Committee's inquiry into the so-called Bolshevik propaganda, but the exhaustive investigation into German propaganda led the

<sup>29</sup> The Sub-Committee consisted of Senators Overman, King, Wolcott, Nelson and Sterling, all men of long senatorial experience and of recognized ability. It all too often happens that congressional investigations in the United States are entrusted to senators or congressmen who have already reached a conclusion which they desire to vindicate, or have some personal ambition which they desire to serve. Inquiries when so conducted, of course, exclude rather than discover the truth. Because of our unhappy experience in this regard, I emphasize the character and sturdy independence of the members composing this particular Sub-Committee.



Committee, in its report filed in July 1919, to conclusions which fully sustain the statements of the President in his War Message.<sup>30</sup> Incidentally, it may be remarked that the report of the Committee is less favorable to Ambassador Bernstorff than his own account of his part in the conspiracies and there is quoted on page xxii a telegram from Bernstorff to the German Foreign Office which shows that, even as late as January 22, 1917, the Ambassador was busy trying to bring some mysterious influence to bear upon the Congress to affect its action, and also to stir up Irish hostility to the Allied cause:

I request authority to pay out up to \$50,000 in order, as on former occasions, to influence Congress, through the organization you know of, which can perhaps prevent war. I am beginning in the meantime to act accordingly. In the above circumstances a public official German declaration in favor of Ireland is highly desirable in order to gain the support of Irish influence here.

The evidence printed with the report shows an amazing web of agitation and intrigue leading to frequent disturbance and violence, all of which was, of course, both in violation of our laws and in callous disregard of our right to be undisturbed while we remained officially neutral and officially

<sup>30</sup> Senate Document No. 62, 66th Congress, First Session, 1919, "Brewing and Liquor Interests and German and Bolshevik Propaganda," Reports and Hearings, 3 v. See particularly v. I, p. vi-xxviii.



in amity and friendship with the nation in whose interest and with whose connivance the disturbance was caused.

Too many books have been written and the facts are too well known to justify any elaborate description here of the extent to which, under modern conditions, any industrial and commercial nation interlaces its domestic welfare with its export and import trade. Prior to 1914, there were economic barriers but they were relatively moderate as compared with those which have been established since 1918. Their application had been gradual, reciprocal arrangements and understandings had been worked out, and world trade was a reliable feature of each nation's industrial and commercial life. Next to Great Britain, the United States was, of course, the greatest exporter of industrial products. The welfare of vast sections of the United States depended upon the world market for cereals and cotton. Minerals and oils were surplus products with us and their sale abroad was an essential factor to the maintenance of the scale of production to which our whole life had become adjusted.

The first effect of the war was a profound disorganization of this whole arrangement. Mr. Millis estimates that the exclusion of the Central Powers from our markets cut off at one blow 13 percent of our foreign trade. But our trouble arose not merely from the loss of the markets we did lose,

but from the change in the demand of the overseas customers who were still left to us. In every belligerent country the needs of the civil population were reduced to a minimum and every country became concerned to import new forms of industrial products or larger quantities of raw materials especially adapted to war uses.

From the beginning to the end of the war, the cotton situation in the United States continued to be serious and the millions of people who depended upon the prosperity of the cotton market were constantly conscious of the fact that they were bearing a crushing part of the price of the war to the world. We were already in a depression in 1914 which was perhaps magnified for political purposes by those who opposed the extraordinary legislation of the first years of the Wilson Administration. Sales of securities on the New York market by European holders came in such an avalanche that it was necessary to close the Stock Exchange. In October 1913 we had exported 257,172 bales of cotton. In October 1914 we shipped only 21,219 bales and the price collapsed from  $12\frac{1}{2}\phi$  to  $7\frac{1}{4}\phi$ , which was known to be far below the cost of production. As against Europe, the United States was a debtor country; and as the European nations gathered their resources they were pressing us for payment, with the result that the pound sterling went to \$7.00 and the franc to  $23\frac{1}{2}\phi$  as American debtors

undertook to cover European commitments. The banks of the country made such efforts as they could to meet this situation, supervising the organization of pools in cotton, gold, and banking resources to aggregate the financial strength of the country in support at the points of greatest weakness.

This sudden and disastrous effect of the outbreak of the war eased as the overseas nations began to order American staples, and the fact that Europe was beginning again to take our products and particularly our raw materials was generally welcomed in the United States as a sign of relief and reassurance. Nobody questioned the complete legality of neutral trade and the nation gave itself to finding outlets for its surplus and relief for its own distress wherever anybody who could pay was in a position to buy.

On December 15, 1914, the German Ambassador left with the State Department a memorandum in which he said:

Under the general principles of international law no exception can be taken to neutral states letting war material go to Germany's enemies from or through their territory. This is in accordance with Article 7 of the Hague conventions of October 18, 1907, concerning the rights and duties of neutrals in naval and land war. (F.R.S., 1914, p. 647)

Both Germany and Austria later made efforts to induce our Government to change the rules of neu-



trality thus conceded in view of unprecedented circumstances which they contended made our neutrality wholly favorable to the Allies because of their control of the sea, but, as we have seen, the American Government, after its attempt to secure the general adoption of the Declaration of London, continued to interpret its rights by the established and recognized prewar formulae and declined to undertake the responsibility of changing the rules in the middle of the war merely in response to claims by belligerents that the conditions had changed under which the rules were formulated.

In much of the postwar discussion of the doctrine of neutrality and its future application, there is to be found advocacy of the policy of general embargoes on the theory that any trade with belligerents by neutrals is likely to involve the neutral ultimately in the war. Manifestly if any such policy is to be adopted, it must be announced before a war begins as it would be a distinct breach of neutrality to decline to continue to trade with a nation after war began. Such a course would involve a disapproving and punitive judgment upon the nation with which we thus declined to trade and such judgments are, of course, an anathema to that whole school of international lawyers which feels that neutrality, in the classical sense, rather than isolation, is the safest course for a nation which wants to remain unentangled.

But whatever may be the views of international lawyers as to the wisest course, and whatever policy may be legally adopted in the future in maintaining abstinence from foreign wars, the situation in 1914 was definitely that the United States, as a great trading nation, had rights and obligations upon which others had come to rely, and to the extent that our country endeavored to restore its own shattered commercial and industrial structure by continuing to engage in legitimate commerce, it was entirely justified by the accepted rules of law and morals.

As the size of the war and its prolongation became apparent, American trade grew by leaps and bounds. Buying orders from the belligerents to whom delivery could be made multiplied both in munitions and in staples. Industry, prostrated by its loss of customary markets, reorganized itself for the manufacture of the new types of industrial products in demand, and other neutral countries, cut off from the sources of supply on which they had relied, began to buy from us an increasing variety and volume both of raw materials and manufactured products. This led to a war boom in the United States and to the building of "war babies" which restored our labor to jobs and greatly increased the apparent general prosperity of the country. As the duration of the war was unpredictable, the prices paid for special products were high,



both because of the necessities of the buyers and because of the uncertainty of the seller as to how long the orders would continue upon which he depended to amortize his investment in new plants and equipment. I hold no brief for war prosperity. On purely economic grounds it is, in the long view, expensive and unreliable, but I think something can be said for a nation endeavoring to ameliorate, so far as it can, the economic disaster thrust upon it by the war activities of others, and I venture the observation that the lessons of history indicate that in any future similar situation it will be extremely difficult to induce our people to keep from seeking such relief when they begin to suffer too cruelly as the result of wars in which they have no part. I am disposed personally to fear that neutrality legislation, now enacted, which looks to isolation and complete trade abstention with belligerents generally and is at variance with the laws of neutral trade accepted by the rest of the world, will have inherent in it the grave danger of our being unable to control our own people into obedience when the pressure of distress becomes greater than they are willing to bear.

The effect of war upon the internal industry and commerce of a nation is to divert all of the nation's energies to the creation and support of its armies as a first consideration. The satisfaction of normal peacetime needs of a civilian population is a



wholly secondary consideration and, in a desperate war, is reduced to the lowest level consistent with the maintenance of that morale on the home front without which the army in the field of battle will disintegrate. Our own experience in 1917-1918 has given those of us who remember it a vivid picture of the reversal of all of our processes of living, even to the acceptance of meatless and fuelless days, as a voluntary contribution by civilians to the aggregate national strength. The need for man power in the army and in army industries reduces the available productive power in other industries and increases the volume of imports when they can be safely transported and the national finances permit their purchase. The effect of all this upon nations, belligerent and neutral alike, in a war which lasts more than four years, is revolutionary. So it was that from 1914 to 1917 American energy found new outlets and American needs new sources of satisfaction as we adjusted ourselves to the world in which we had to live and in which, of course, we desired to live as well as we could under the circumstances. In our overseas trade, munitions continued to bulk large, but our exports included great categories of supplies for civilian consumption, which under normal conditions the countries to which we sent them would have produced or manufactured for themselves.

Now, of course, trade expresses itself in dollars

and cents, and dollars and cents are the business of bankers. That is what bankers are for. For the convenience of commerce, banks have grown up as mechanisms for the settlement of accounts, and a great technique of operation has been instituted to enable a manufacturer to deal indirectly with his customers through the assistance of checks, drafts, lines of credit, and loans and balances which, while they express themselves on the books of bankers, are in fact the records of transactions in the ordinary trade relations of a people. In this, for the most part, bankers have no other interest than that the use of their facilities and mechanisms make the transactions possible between the primary producer and the ultimate consumer. For the use of his facilities and services the banker is, of course, paid, just as is the transportation agency, or the warehouse man, or the salesman, or the advertiser, and the banker has the same kind of an interest in the promotion of increased trade in order that he may get larger pay for his greater services, as has any of these other instrumentalities, which, in their aggregate, constitute the mechanism through which trade is carried on. In like fashion, international trade consists of exports and imports and for exactly analogous reasons there must needs be bankers with the facilities and knowledge to deal with international financial transactions. The conversion of the value of the currency of one country



into the currency of another country, the settlement of international balances, the creation and service of international credits, the safeguarding of the exportation of capital for investment, or the handling of foreign capital imported for investment, all require the services of specialists, and international bankers are merely those who train themselves to perform for international trade this indispensable service. The transactions which pass through their books are not their transactions, but the transactions of others who are using their facilities, and so when the volume of international banking transactions is stated in dollars and cents, it merely means that producers and consumers have traded with one another over international frontiers, and that their transactions are recorded in the books of international bankers who have been one of the facilitating intermediaries who made the exchange possible. Perhaps because of our failure to realize what the banker really is and does, we are all too likely to blame bankers as though their transactions represented some peculiarly heartless and detached interest in mere money, when in fact for the most part their facilities have supplied no more than the rails upon which the trains of trade have operated.

There has grown up accordingly in very recent years a disposition to charge that bankers and munition makers exerted some sort of pressure upon



the Government which affected its policy and ultimately led to our entering the war in 1917.

So far as munition makers are concerned, the charge is a singular selection of a particular group out of a much larger and quite indiscriminate mass. It is easy to demonstrate that the condition of cotton farmers in the United States was infinitely more a subject of concern and anxiety on the part of the Government, executive and legislative, than the interest or welfare of the munition makers.

I am, perhaps, the hardest person in the United States to impress with the idea that munition makers had any influence upon the American decision. Villa raided our Mexican border just as I went to Washington to become Secretary of War and my first duty was to arm and equip the Pershing Expedition, called "punitive" but in reality defensive, and later to arm and equip the augmented National Guard mobilized on the border. By using obsolete weapons of one kind and another, the force was armed, but the Government owned but seven airplanes which could fly far enough to get to Mexico and Captain Foulois reported to me that none of them could be safely flown even on missions of local recognizance. I then spent months trying to persuade some one to build airplanes for the Army but the art was then limited to exhibition types in America and even emergency orders could not be promised under six months' delivery and

then only three or four could be expected. Similarly there was but one company in the United States equipped to build heavy machine guns. In a national emergency, that company promised to build seventy in a year and to do its best to deliver the first dozen in six months.

When we began the actual mobilization of material for our participation in the World War there simply were no American munition makers. General Bliss went to England in January 1918, and continued an agreement made in June 1917 whereby the British and French supplied us with cannon out of their surpluses in exchange for raw materials. In the early months of the war our manufacture of guns was negligible. We bought in Canada a large supply of Ross rifles, an obsolete arm, and used the leftovers of the Spanish War, but still gave some of our recruits initial training in the manual of arms with broom sticks. That we were always able to have enough modern rifles for our men overseas was due to the fact that we were able to buy a British-owned factory built in this country after the World War began, and modified the Enfield, with which the British were armed, to our needs.

We bought revolvers and pistols of every sort, ransacked the museums of city police departments for confiscated "concealed weapons" and we got the best our pistol manufacturers could do under



"speed up production," but at the end of the war we were still short of the required supply. For months American manufacturers were unable to make heavy ammunition. Some gadgets called "boosters and adapters," necessary parts of high explosive shells, balked our ingenuity for months until I still think of them as the unattainable but indispensable price of success in war.

We converted typewriter factories into fuse factories and generally converted American industrial plants to the war material nearest their normal product. Somehow we got through—in the opinion of the impatient, none too well. But a munitions industry large enough to be interested, much less influential, in our going to war simply did not exist. During 1916 I never saw a munition maker except as I sent for him and urged him to try to help us in the emergency of our border troubles.

But the whole of American industry and all of the persons engaged in it were necessary and proper objects of governmental concern. The workers in munition industries were merely American citizens earning their living, who in turn were purchasers of commodities grown or manufactured by their fellow citizens. To that extent, no doubt, all sorts of statistical tabulations were made which included them in summaries by which our standard of living was shown and the prosperity or depression of our general economic life determined, but there was



no munition industry in the United States in 1914, and by 1917 the industry in that field which had been created here, either by or on behalf of the Allied nations, was merely a part of America's industrial plant diverted from peacetime to war-time production, and the managers of those industrial undertakings could have had no interest in taking the country into the war. To have done so would have been the most shortsighted of policies, for after we went into the war, war profits were reduced to a minimum and excess profits taxes squeezed the profits out of war with a wringer of constantly increasing efficiency. Upon the plainest terms, the interest of the owners of "war babies" was in keeping our country at peace while they continued to supply the belligerents with their needs upon such terms as they could arrange. The charge against munition makers seems to me largely an unsupported accusation made as an argument in furtherance of a policy by those who believe in the nationalization of all arms manufacture and the total prohibition of international traffic in arms.

There are two sides to that argument. Undoubtedly if a nation must depend wholly upon its own industrial organization for the production of necessary war supplies, the consequence will be an immense stimulation in the armament business and a consequent peacetime diversion of capital and labor

in the war industries. The policy would in all likelihood lead also to alliances based on anticipated war economics which might be unwholesome or even menacing. For our present purpose, however, the munitions industry can be safely regarded as a mere element in the general problem of maintaining our own domestic welfare, since the exportation of munitions by a neutral to belligerents was thoroughly sanctioned both by international law and by accepted standards of international morality during the whole period of our neutrality in the World War.

With regard to the alleged influence of bankers I feel obliged to speak under the limitations of a very narrow personal experience. While I was a member of the Cabinet from 1916-1921, I do not recall having had a conversation with a banker on any subject, though the strong likelihood is that petty personal concerns were in some way or another filtered through the books of some banks. My complete absence of recollection on that subject extends to conversations with my Cabinet associates and generally with responsible official persons in the Government. I never heard quoted, by any one of them, the opinion of any banker, national or international, that the United States ought to go into the war or that the interests of the United States would be furthered by any suggested line of conduct on the part of our nation in dealing with



either group of belligerents. As a consequence, I am forced to conclude that if any banker sought to exercise pressure in favor of any national policy on the subject, I was for some reason completely excluded and all of my Cabinet associates conspired to keep me in ignorance of the plan.

The record of the bankers on the subject is relatively simple. Prior to the outbreak of the World War, by the settled and accepted principles of international law, it was unneutral for a government to make a loan to a belligerent, but it was at the same time entirely proper for the citizens of a neutral to make such loans if they saw fit. The history of all countries, and notably of our own, was full of belligerent borrowing by the flotation of securities in neutral countries. Early in August 1914, Messrs. J. P. Morgan & Company inquired of Secretary Bryan whether or not our policy would permit such loans in the European war. To this inquiry Secretary Bryan on August 15 responded by telegram:

There is no reason why loans should not be made to the governments of neutral nations, but in the judgment of this Government, loans by American bankers to any foreign nation which is at war are inconsistent with the true spirit of neutrality. (F.R.S., 1914, p. 580)

The view thus expressed by Mr. Bryan was not a statement of the legal right of citizens of the



United States, but was based upon a local and peculiar condition set forth by him in a letter to the President dated August 10, 1914. The proposed loan which raised the question was sought by France, but Mr. Bryan foresaw similar applications from other countries and said with regard to them:

*Second:* There is a special and local reason, it seems to me, why this course would be advisable. Mr. Lansing observed in the discussion of the subject that a loan would be taken by those in sympathy with the country in whose behalf the loan was negotiated. If we approved of a loan to France we could not, of course, object to a loan to Great Britain, Germany, Russia, Austria or to any other country, and if loans were made to these countries our citizens would be divided into groups, each group loaning money to the country which it favors and this money could not be furnished without expressions of sympathy. These expressions of sympathy are disturbing enough when they do not rest upon pecuniary interests—they would be still more disturbing if each group was pecuniarily interested in the success of the nation to whom its members had loaned money.

*Third:* The powerful financial interests which would be connected with these loans would be tempted to use their influence through the newspapers to support the interests of the Government to which they had loaned because the value of the security would be directly affected by the result of the war. We would thus find our newspapers violently arrayed on one side or the other, each paper supporting a financial group and pecuniary interest. All of this influence would make it all the more

difficult for us to maintain neutrality, as our action on various questions that would arise would affect one side or the other and powerful financial interests would be thrown into the balance. (Maritime Commerce, v. II, p. 187)

Messrs. Morgan & Company complied with the wish implicit in Secretary Bryan's telegram, but by October 1914 the State Department had more or less retreated to a strictly legal position and small loans were made to both France and Germany. This modification of policy proceeded from a statement of the President to Mr. Lansing that in his view there was a difference between the creation of bank credits for belligerent governments to be used in the purchase of supplies in America and the flotation of a public loan. (Maritime Commerce, v. II, p. 222)

In March 1915 the State Department gave a negative clearance to a one-year credit offered by public subscription, and by September of that year had come to its settled policy of interposing no objection to loans offered for public subscription in the United States by any of the belligerents.

So far as the conduct of American bankers in this matter is concerned, the record so far as I know indicates complete compliance on their part with the policies laid down by the State Department. Whatever shift took place was in official opinion and the reasons for it are not far to seek.



On September 6, 1915, Mr. Lansing wrote to the President:

If the European countries cannot find means to pay for the excess of goods sold to them over those purchased from them, they will have to stop buying and our present export trade will shrink proportionately. The result would be restriction of outputs, industrial depression, idle capital and idle labor, numerous failures, financial demoralization, and general unrest and suffering among the laboring classes. (Maritime Commerce, v. II, p. 379)

This did not express a view or purpose entertained confidentially within administration circles: the situation was known and commented upon in the newspapers of the day. Thus on September 15, 1915, the Washington correspondent of the *New York Times*, quoting the above sentences from Mr. Lansing's letter to the President, said:

Officials view the proposed loan sympathetically, not because of its facilitating effect upon the export of munitions, but because of its support to the general trade markets of the country. It was pointed out today that the export of munitions would probably continue, as they are necessary to the Allies' welfare, but unless the loan or some equivalent for it could be floated, the general export trade of the country would be at a standstill.

It was said today that under the stimulating effect of the loan, cotton might get back to 12 or 13 cents, and there might be expected a similarly good effect upon the prices of other staples.



Undoubtedly the Secretary of the Treasury, the Secretary of Commerce, the Secretary of Labor, the Secretary of Agriculture, and the Secretary of State were watching with grave concern, by all the tests they could apply, the rise and fall of the general welfare of the American people, and endeavored to forecast and influence events which would affect that welfare. That no one of them for a moment considered any departure from our rights and duties as a neutral goes without saying both because the character of the men themselves is known and also because they were in complete sympathy with the policy of the President which, as we have already seen, was committed to neutrality not only to keep us out of war, but also upon the very much higher ground of the ideal mission which he conceived for us as the great neutral.

The position of the bankers changed from time to time. At the outset of the war in 1914, their task was to prevent, so far as they could, catastrophe in the United States from the sudden suspension of a substantial part of our overseas trade and the dumping on the American market of American securities held abroad and sent here for realization. As this phase passed, the task of the bankers changed. It then became their duty, so far as they could, to prevent any avoidable dislocation and confusion in American industry by unregulated and haphazard purchases for overseas shipment,

and to keep the business of international exchange working as smoothly and favorably as possible to prevent disorder in our own financial arrangements. When the overseas nations had sold here their holdings in American securities and began to borrow money here on the strength of their credit and their collateral, the international bankers, acting for American trade and industry, had the duty of keeping that form of financial undertaking in as complete order and under as many safeguards as possible, and finally when European nations sought to pay for their American purchases by the sale of their credit in this country in the form of loans offered for public subscriptions, it became the task of the bankers to carry on the necessary negotiations and to carry through the arrangements which were, in effect, not loans by bankers, but loans by American citizens to the belligerent governments to enable them to continue their purchases from American producers. That the heads of the Treasury and State Departments in Washington conferred with informed and intelligent bankers at various stages in these operations is true as a matter of course. Had they failed to do so they would have been blameworthy in the highest degree. Whatever the interest of the bankers may or may not have been, their knowledge was indispensable if the responsible officers of the Government were to form intelligent opinions and de-



termine wisely national policies. That some of the bankers were personally pro-Ally in their sentiments is obviously true. That some very important international bankers in the United States were pro-German in their sentiment is equally true. That the sentiments of either group had the slightest effect upon President Wilson, if they were even communicated to him, is so fanciful and improbable as to pass the bounds of belief, and as it was Mr. Wilson who determined the national policy, there is no case unless it can be shown that he was influenced by some such pressure. Those who knew Mr. Wilson, and particularly those who realized the state of his mind as the result of the opposition of bankers to the Federal Reserve Act, will not be disposed to believe that he was predisposed in favor of any view of national financial policy they were likely to entertain.

It is thus easy to see that the problem of maintaining its domestic welfare is a very difficult and embarrassing one for a neutral nation. This problem was particularly difficult in a nation like ours with the traditional sympathies of its people divided and its economic welfare daily at the mercy of a long drawn-out war to which it was not a party, but which summoned and consumed the energies of practically all the great countries of the world with which it had developed, in peacetime, vital trade relations. The fact that the President was



able to dominate the tides of opinion among our people throughout two and one-half years of confusion, agitation, anxiety, and anger, is both a remarkable tribute to his leadership and, it seems to me, a convincing proof of his own loyalty to an ideal high enough to keep his spirit nerved to the task. A brief examination of that ideal will enable me to conclude this paper with some observations which it seems to me just and, I hope, helpful to make.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE LEADERSHIP OF PUBLIC OPINION TOWARD AN IDEAL

**T**HROUGH the complicated and crashing strains of a Wagnerian tragedy there run a series of motifs of which first one and then another dominates the action. Among them is a master motif which emerges as a note of ultimate hope or of triumph and reassures the listener into the belief that, at the end, the tragedy will subside and the great and righteous object of the passionate struggle will be achieved. So throughout the World War there were the motifs of waste and loss, of suffering and of death, and it was often difficult to tell whether we were not in fact bidden to witness the collapse and destruction of modern civilization. But to President Wilson the dominant motif was one of hope, and he continued to hear it and to feel its inspiration when the rest of us felt only despair. Perhaps because of spiritual weariness, perhaps because of the disappointments of Versailles, it became the fashion after 1918 to speak with dispraise of idealism. Peoples everywhere, as they turned to reconstruct their shattered societies, became very realistic indeed and things had value only if they were material and could be measured in the coin of the realm. The fierce spirit of na-

tionalism, as it set up trade barriers and continued, on an economic plane, the struggles which had ceased in the trenches, made of the postwar world a new and less heroic battlefield. Efforts to secure an armistice in that war have not yet succeeded and thoughtful people everywhere are debating whether or not the race must pass through another and even more dreadful crisis before it acquires a philosophy in which peace can be preserved by constructive and coöperative agencies. Without venturing to prophesy how long this new war is to continue or what its ultimate peace terms will be, it is still profitable to examine, if only as a fact, the central motif of President Wilson's thought throughout the period of our neutrality. When it has been set forth it will be judged according to respective temperaments. Those with a Nietzschean strain will discard it as dream stuff in favor of some other philosophy which bids us "Be hard." Those who believe this to be a world governed by moral laws will take another view and will be mystified that a philosophy at once so beautiful and so reasonable could have failed. So far as this paper is concerned, however, we are interested in this subject only for the light it throws upon the maintenance of American neutrality and our country's ultimate participation in the war.

This central thought was first disclosed in an address to the Senate on August 19, 1914. Dealing



with the general aspects of American neutrality, the President said:

My thought is of America. I am speaking, I feel sure, the earnest wish and purpose of every thoughtful American that this great country of ours, which is, of course, the first in our thoughts and in our hearts, should show herself in this time of peculiar trial a nation fit beyond others to exhibit the fine poise of undisturbed judgment, the dignity of self-control, the efficiency of dispassionate action; a Nation that neither sits in judgment upon others nor is disturbed in her own counsels and which keeps herself fit and free to do what is honest and disinterested and truly serviceable for the peace of the world. (New Democracy, v. I, p. 158-9)

On September 4, 1914, in a letter addressed to Mr. Doremus and explaining his inability to take an active part in the approaching campaign, he said that it was his duty to remain in Washington devoting his entire time to the profound disturbance which had come upon the world:

... These are days big with destiny for the United States, as for the other nations of the world. A little wisdom, a little courage, a little self-forgetful devotion may under God turn that destiny this way or that. Great hearts, great natures, will respond. Even little men will rejoice to be stimulated and guided and set an heroic example. Parties will fare well enough without nursing if the men who make them up and the men who lead them forget themselves to serve a cause and set a great people forward on the path of liberty and peace. (New Democracy, v. I, p. 167)

In a Jackson Day address at Indianapolis on January 8, 1915, the President said:

And what a future it is, my friends! Look abroad upon the troubled world! Only America at peace! Among all the great powers of the world only America saving her power for her own people! Only America using her great character and her great strength in the interests of peace and of prosperity! Do you not think it likely that the world will some time turn to America and say, "You were right and we were wrong. You kept your head when we lost ours. You tried to keep the scale from tipping, and we threw the whole weight of arms in one side of the scale. Now, in your self-possession, in your coolness, in your strength, may we not turn to you for counsel and for assistance?" Think of the deep-wrought destruction of economic resources, of life, and of hope that is taking place in some parts of the world, and think of the reservoir of hope, the reservoir of energy, the reservoir of sustenance that there is in this great land of plenty! May we not look forward to the time when we shall be called blessed among the nations, because we succored the nations of the world in their time of distress and of dismay? I for one pray God that that solemn hour may come, and I know the solidity of character and I know the exaltation of hope, I know the big principle with which the American people will respond to the call of the world for this service. I thank God that those who believe in America, who try to serve her people, are likely to be also what America herself from the first hoped and meant to be—the servant of mankind. (New Democracy, v. I, p. 250-1)



In an address to the Associated Press on April 20, 1915, he said:

So that I am not speaking in a selfish spirit when I say that our whole duty, for the present at any rate, is summed up in this motto, "America first." Let us think of America before we think of Europe, in order that America may be fit to be Europe's friend when the day of tested friendship comes. The test of friendship is not now sympathy with the one side or the other, but getting ready to help both sides when the struggle is over. . . .

We are the mediating Nation of the world. I do not mean that we undertake not to mind our own business and to mediate where other people are quarreling. I mean the word in a broader sense. We are compounded of the nations of the world; we mediate their blood, we mediate their traditions, we mediate their sentiments, their tastes, their passions; we are ourselves compounded of those things. We are, therefore, able to understand all nations; we are able to understand them in the compound, not separately, as partisans, but unitedly as knowing and comprehending and embodying them all. It is in that sense that I mean that America is a mediating Nation.

. . . But I am interested in neutrality because there is something so much greater to do than fight; there is a distinction waiting for this Nation that no nation has ever yet got. That is the distinction of absolute self-control and self-mastery. (New Democracy, v. I, p. 303-5)

Addressing the Daughters of the American Revolution on October 11, 1915, the President said:



Neutrality is a negative word. It is a word that does not express what America ought to feel. America has a heart and that heart throbs with all sorts of intense sympathies, but America has schooled its heart to love the things that America believes in and it ought to devote itself only to the things that America believes in; and, believing that America stands apart in its ideals, it ought not to allow itself to be drawn, so far as its heart is concerned, into anybody's quarrel. Not because it does not understand the quarrel, not because it does not in its head assess the merits of the controversy, but because America has promised the world to stand apart and maintain certain principles of action which are grounded in law and in justice. We are not trying to keep out of trouble; we are trying to preserve the foundations upon which peace can be rebuilt. Peace can be rebuilt only upon the ancient and accepted principles of international law, only upon those things which remind nations of their duties to each other, and, deeper than that, of their duties to mankind and to humanity. (New Democracy, v. I, p. 378)

Even in speaking on the subject of preparedness, the President stated his belief in the providential character of the mission of America:

Here is the Nation God has builded by our hands. What shall we do with it? Who is there who does not stand ready at all times to act in her behalf in a spirit of devoted and disinterested patriotism? We are yet only in the youth and first consciousness of our power. The day of our country's life is still but in its fresh morning. Let us lift our eyes to the great tracts of life yet to be conquered in the interests of righteous peace.

Come, let us renew our allegiance to America, conserve her strength in its purity, make her chief among those who serve mankind, self-reverenced, self-commanded, witness of all forces of quiet counsel, strong above all others in good will and the might of invincible justice and right. (New Democracy, v. I, p. 391-2)

It is difficult to resist the pleasure of tracing this insistent theme throughout the addresses of the President delivered in the year 1916. Those addresses were very numerous and were both to the Congress and to private assemblies and persons. They all moved in one direction and sounded one call of inspiration. The President believed that Providence had set the United States apart as a mediating nation, and that the day would certainly come when the exhausted European powers would turn to him, as our representative, to use our great spiritual and material power to aid them in constructing a plan of life which they could accept from us as a disinterested friend but which they would be unable to find for themselves, blinded by passion and grief and disappointment. We have already seen that this belief on the President's part was insistently repeated to the diplomatic representatives of the belligerent governments in Washington and that their various foreign offices thoroughly understood that the President's dominant interest was in preserving America for the mission of aiding in a healing peace. So far as I know, this



was never resented by any of the foreign offices except that of the German Empire, where it was received frequently with disdain and characterized as the personal vanity of a man who desired to make a great place for himself in history. The German Emperor's comments upon dispatches laid before him indicating this desire on President Wilson's part are characteristically impatient and scornful.

This I believe to have been the central and guiding thought in President Wilson's leadership of public opinion in America and in his authoritative control of our diplomatic relations through the State Department during the whole period of our neutrality. I am fortified in this belief not only by the record, which seems conclusive, but by my personal recollection of all I saw and heard after I became Secretary of War in 1916. Every argument and every proposal that I heard made in President Wilson's presence was finally brought to the test of how it would affect our ultimate usefulness to the world when peace terms came to be made; and, while it was always assumed, it was nevertheless often expressed, by the President and others who understood him and in his presence, that in the long view the best interests of the United States required that there should be a world in which it could play the drama of its own great development free from the disturbance and catastrophe of wars



among those who also had parts to play on the stage of world affairs.

I shall not prolong this paper by any extended examination of the President's use of Colonel House as his personal representative. Admittedly, it was an unusual, if not a unique, thing for a President to have a personal representative in constant correspondence and personal contact with the higher officers of governments with which the President was necessarily sustaining, through a regular department of the Government, official relations; but it was the very fact that official relations were governed by traditional and formal rules that made it necessary for the President to have an informal and irresponsible contact in addition. So far as the war was concerned, the State Department, of course, conducted all relations affecting American interests. Had the geographical situation made it possible for Lloyd George, Balfour, Bethmann-Hollweg, and other responsible prime ministers during the course of the war to visit Washington informally, they would all have conducted any formal business they had with the State Department, but nobody would have doubted the propriety of the President's receiving them as guests in the White House and discussing with them his hopes for a new world when the present difficulties had come to an end. Informal conversations of that kind, of course, were impossible. Colonel House's

mission was to have them on the President's behalf. This he did by intimate contacts with members of these governments in their own capitals. He visited London and Paris, but he also visited Berlin. He told them the far-reaching hope of the President and he brought back to the President reports of their reception of the ideals which he was pursuing. It was not Colonel House's business to bind the United States, nor was he under any particular obligation to be discreet. The whole value of his service lay in his being intimate, as he tried to find how much hope there was in the world for the ideals which the President cherished. Everybody with whom he talked knew him to be unofficial and without authority to do more than discuss hopes and plans and this he obviously did with undiscriminating candor. The complete freedom with which Bernstorff constantly consulted him has been revealed in Bernstorff's book and in the dispatches which he sent to his Government as the result of these conferences, and the relationship was so intimate that in times of great anxiety and stress Bernstorff repeatedly went to Colonel House for advice and even assistance in devising ways to avoid a crisis. There are no scales by which such matters can be weighed; but the evidence, considered as a whole, seems to indicate about the same amount of confidential and indiscreet discussion between German statesmen and diplomats and Colonel House



on the one side, and Sir Edward Grey and Colonel House on the other. That each group tried to impress Colonel House with the righteousness of its cause and that he expressed sympathy with so much of it as seemed to him righteous is altogether likely. That the statesmen on either side intentionally, or indeed at all, beguiled Colonel House, or misled President Wilson through him, is simply at variance with the action taken at any stage of the official relations between the United States and the various belligerent governments.

There have been from time to time charges made in the public press that Mr. Lansing, as Secretary of State, and Walter H. Page, our Ambassador to Great Britain, were "unneutral." Their positions, of course, were official; that of Colonel House was wholly unofficial.

The criticism of Mr. Page is based upon statements contained in his "Life and Letters" published in 1922 and particularly upon a cablegram sent by him in March 1917 to President Wilson. Professor Seymour in his "American Neutrality" discusses the correct interpretation of that cablegram and the misinterpretations of it which have achieved the greatest notice. Apart from the cablegram, however, it of course is true that Mr. Page personally and philosophically sympathized with the Allies. He was a highly intelligent and completely trained scholar, an American of an an-



cient tradition steeped in knowledge of the things which formed the spiritual basis of America's institutional and political history. With such a background it was inevitable that he should sympathize with the British position, and particularly that he should see the profound effect upon America's place and chance in the world which would result from a destruction of the British Empire by the philosophy which at that time animated the Central Powers. Living in intimate contact with the sacrifices the British people were making, he no doubt at times permitted his sympathies to be known and it may be that they colored some of his communications of an official character to the President and to the State Department, but both the President and the Secretary of State knew Mr. Page and were perfectly well aware that while they might have to make allowances for sympathies which grew out of his deepest intellectual and spiritual nature, he was nevertheless always fundamentally an American, thinking only of America's highest interests. That the President and Secretary of State both thought it necessary to be conscious of Mr. Page's nature and surroundings in dealing with his advice is abundantly clear. Thus Mr. Lansing in his "War Memoirs," published in 1935, at page 170 says:

One of the chief results of Mr. Page's visit to the United States and of the conferences which he had

with Mr. Wilson was, unless I am greatly mistaken, to make the President more than ever irritated against the British... His insistence on our adopting the British way of looking at the situation stirred the ire of the President and made him stubborn...

These statements of Mr. Lansing could not have been made if he had been in effect conspiring with Mr. Page to influence the President's mind toward joining the Allies in the war.

The charges against Mr. Lansing grew out of the very frank statements he made in his "War Memoirs," and particularly a memorandum of his dated July 11, 1915, "Consideration and Outline of Policies," which he made for his own guidance. It must be taken as true that Secretary Lansing believed the war to be one between imperialism and democracy, and that he regarded the German submarine campaign as only the most conclusive evidence of the disaster which the dominance of a military imperialism would mean to the world. That conviction led him to express to himself, and for his own guidance, complete distrust of the promises of the German Government to abandon unrestricted submarine warfare, and in that distrust he was thoroughly vindicated by the event. The position finally assumed by the German Government on that subject was that the ethics of the sinking of unarmed ships without opportunity for non-combatant passengers to escape was to be



judged solely by determining whether or not it would be helpful in the military adventure. We are to judge Mr. Lansing, however, not by the views he entertained but by the official action he took, and as I have already pointed out, the German Government regarded him as neutral and helpful.

In this connection it is interesting to note that officials in the German Foreign Office thought Bernstorff had been too much affected by his American environment to be a reliable adviser. Helfferich said in commenting upon Bernstorff's interpretation of the President's address of January 22, 1917:

... And the only way in which I can account to myself for the fact that Ambassador Count v. Bernstorff interpreted this message to constitute a further step toward a peace acceptable to us, and continued to send in reports even after the 22d of January, reflecting this view, is the length of time during which he continued to be cut off from every direct intercourse and every direct contact with his German home, subjected to the strongly suggestive influences of the American world by which he was surrounded. This message of President Wilson's of January 22, 1917, was but the mask which failed to conceal behind it the features of the Wilson of Versailles. (German Documents, v. I, p. 684.)

The most elaborate statement of the case against Mr. Lansing is by O. W. Riegel in "The Pattern of the Unneutral Diplomat: Robert Lansing and



the World War," *The Southern Review*, v. II, no. I. But the entire criticism is based upon what Mr. Lansing thought rather than on any action he took officially.

There is really no such thing as a neutral diplomat. The sympathies of such men as Myron T. Herrick, our Ambassador to France; Brand Whitlock, our Ambassador to Belgium; Thomas Nelson Page, our Ambassador to Rome; Walter H. Page, our Ambassador to London; and Mr. Lansing, as Secretary of State, could not be expected to be unaffected by their ultimate beliefs as to the world of which their country was a part, or to remain unaffected by their education and opportunities for observation and their philosophy of life. Every Secretary of State, if he is competent to hold the office, must have far-reaching views upon international relations and a strong desire to see those views ultimately prevail. This does not mean, however, any disloyalty to their country or any partisanship in controversies between other countries except as those controversies may ultimately affect American interests. Perhaps the whole case can be summed up by saying that Mr. Lansing, as Secretary of State, believed it to be better for the United States not to have German military imperialism crush democracy as represented by England and France; and that at times, in reflecting upon this subject, he went so far as to feel that such a triumph

would be a catastrophe which the United States would be justified in preventing by going into the war. Whether or not these views might have caused our going into the war under other circumstances is immaterial to consider, since we went into the war for an entirely different reason and in vindication of very much more direct and immediate American interests. The trouble all arises from the candor with which Mr. Lansing has permitted us to know the inside of his mind, and the criticism made of him, I am persuaded, has come largely from people who believe it to be possible to have a Secretary of State who would be useful in that office and at the same time uninformed and unimaginative about international relations.

Only two other matters of minor importance need be referred to: the so-called "Secret Treaties," and the diplomatic conduct of the United States after we entered the World War. Neither, obviously, can have any bearing on why we entered the war. But they are constantly introduced into discussions of that subject and hence must be dealt with.

When the British Mission came to America immediately after our declaration of war, it is quite clear that Mr. Balfour and Colonel House discussed at least some of the so-called "Secret Treaties" and that Mr. Balfour promised that copies of all of them would be sent to our State De-



partment. In the conversation which President Wilson later had with Mr. Balfour, the same ground was covered and at least some of the Secret Treaties were discussed to some extent. How many of them were referred to was not made a matter of record, but that both the President and the State Department knew of the Treaty of London is clear. All of these treaties were kept secret by the parties to them to prevent a squabble growing up about the distribution of the spoils before there were any spoils to distribute. Some of them were published in 1918 when the Russian archives were released. The experts in the State Department and in the so-called "Inquiry" organized to prepare data for the Paris Peace Conference certainly knew some of the arrangements made by these treaties and we have the testimony of Mr. Walter Lippmann and a good many newspaper references to the treaties to the effect that they were thus used.

The Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on August 19, 1919, interrogated both Secretary Lansing and President Wilson as to the extent of their knowledge of the treaties and the time when such knowledge came to them. Secretary Lansing was at first vague, but after an opportunity to consult State Department records and his own papers he told the Committee that he had known of some of the treaties at an earlier day, but complete and detailed knowledge of all of them was made avail-



able first at the Peace Conference. President Wilson in his answers to the Committee on this subject, took substantially the same ground, although the President's answers are certainly open to two interpretations: one, that he claimed to have known nothing about any of the treaties prior to his arrival at Paris; and two, that he had known about some of them but that his knowledge was more or less casual and that the full disclosure of the "whole series of understandings" was not made to him until he arrived at the Peace Conference. On the basis of the first of these possible interpretations of the President's answers, hasty and harsh accusations have been made as to his truthfulness, but a critical examination of the whole situation leads, it seems to me, inescapably to the other view.

Both before and after we went into the war the President's central thought was upon the establishment of a just and stable peace when the opportunity should come. He had sought by direct inquiry of all the belligerents a statement of their war aims, and in his own addresses had ventured to enumerate quite definite articles which in his opinion would have to be incorporated in any series of treaties at the conclusion of the war if the peace to be established was to be stable. In the formulation of his declarations, he recognized certain well-known national aspirations, like the restoration of Alsace-Lorraine and the establishment of an inde-

pendent Poland, but it is manifest that he took no account whatever of the possibility that there were arrangements among the belligerent nations, although he of course knew that it was quite impossible for a group of nations to coöperate in such a war without the exchange of all sorts of understandings and promises. From his point of view, therefore, it was clear that all of these secret promises and war aims and aspirations would ultimately have to yield to a statesmanlike determination at a peace conference of what was right and just and best in the long view for the world. This, I think, is borne out by the fact that he continued to insist throughout 1917 and 1918 that the territorial aspirations of the Allies should be left for the Peace Conference and that the price of a lasting peace was to be "impartial justice in every item of the settlement no matter whose interest was crossed."

The important thing which Mr. Balfour explained to the President in his long talk on April 30, 1917, was the financial stress in which England found herself due to her own vast expenditures and the extent to which she had been obliged to finance her allies. Upon this subject undoubtedly Mr. Balfour was eager, earnest, and explicit. The result was that the United States immediately began to assist in the maintenance of the British financial position. The circumstances of that conversation made it both right that Mr. Balfour



should refer to the treaties and probable that he did, as well as to other relations existing between England and her allies and to the aspirations of the various belligerents, and that all of these references took the color in the President's mind merely of interests later to be considered and adjudicated rather than obligations which might bind the Allied countries to resist terms of settlement ultimately agreed upon as wise and just. Details of this kind would have interested the President under the circumstances only to a moderate degree both because they required no immediate attention and also because nothing could have been more resolute than the President's intention that the United States should not be bound by arrangements which it had no part in making. His own thought, then, had changed direction but had not changed ultimate purpose. America was going into the war and could no longer reconstruct the peace of the world as a mediator, but that the peace of the world should be placed on a stable foundation as a result of the war remained his fixed objective. He, therefore, quite naturally declined to interest himself in or associate himself with inter-Allied ambitions and purposes, and the impression made upon his mind by those treaties, to the extent that they were discussed, was probably slight. When he got to Paris and found those treaties and other arrangements and ambitions of the Allies lying athwart his



path to the League of Nations, they had to his mind a sinister importance which he had not foreseen and which created in him the surprise which he expressed to the Senate Committee.

Such considerations indicate that the difficulty with the President's testimony before the Senate Committee is not a question of veracity, but rather a lack of clearness and detail about a really complicated question of fact to which no categorical answer could have been given. What one knows about a series of transactions when one learns different details in the series and when one comes to appreciate the importance of the series as a whole are complex questions. The inherent improbability of conscious untruthfulness about this matter on the President's part is impressive not only because of the character of the President but also because in the very examination in which he made these statements he showed familiarity with the fact that the same questions had been asked Secretary Lansing and with the answers which the Secretary had given showing knowledge of some of the treaties long before the Paris Conference. The fact is the President had an unusually accurate and comprehensive memory and he gave direct and personal attention to diplomatic matters throughout the whole period both of our neutrality and our belligerency. He could not have forgotten the Treaty of London or been unaware of the existence of other

treaties and arrangements looking to postwar territorial readjustments. As many of them were common knowledge and some of them figured in his own recorded conversations and correspondence, the explanation of the whole situation therefore seems to me to be that the President's testimony is to be taken not as a disclaimer of piecemeal knowledge, but as a disclaimer of any such consenting knowledge as bound the United States to consider the details of such treaties as any part of our own war objective or any obligation upon us at the Peace Conference. In this view the President's statement that the whole series of arrangements was first disclosed to him at Versailles and that the Government of the United States had no earlier knowledge of them can be understood.<sup>81</sup>

It is very easy, by following the President's thought from the War Message to the end of the war, to demonstrate the truth of these statements. Throughout the whole period he clung to his ideal, fashioning its details and proclaiming them both to our own people and to the people of the world, so that when the Armistice came, he was still insistent that America had no selfish purposes and had had none, that we had ceased to be a mediator and a neutral and had become a belligerent and a

<sup>81</sup> This subject is discussed in *Current History* for June 1929 by Mary Reno Frear in "Did President Wilson Contradict Himself on the Secret Treaties?" Miss Frear has corrected the authorities and discusses the problem clearly and dispassionately.



victor, but that our spirit was still the spirit of the servant in the house.

The United States never became an ally of the Entente Powers, and in order to keep the separation upon which the President insisted, the cumbersome title of the "Allied and Associated Powers" had to be adopted because America was an associate and not an ally. In my own contact with this there are many evidences of this clear insistence in the President's mind. I explained to him the reasons for the maintenance of a separate supply system for the American Army, and for the retention of our own types of weapons and our own calibers of ammunition. For all of this there were sound military reasons, but his acceptance was always with the comment that we had no necessarily complete identity, either of interest or purpose, with any of the Allied nations, and that it was highly important to preserve America's freedom of action by complete independence of equipment and operation. When proposals were made to pool shipping, although the situation very desperately required that it be done, the President yielded reluctantly and only partially. To suggestions that there be a pooling of supplies for the armies, he declined to yield and he rigidly withdrew from our military representatives in Europe even the smallest liberty of diplomatic or political discussion or action, requiring all such questions to be submitted



to him for action. His often expressed view was that we were fighting the same war but our position in it was for American rather than European reasons or objects.

Now that we no longer face the problems which the Administration had to face from 1914 to 1919, it is possible to indulge all sorts of speculations about what might have happened if other courses had been followed. In the flood of talk about peace which has swept through the United States in the years since the war, it is easy for those who do not like what has happened (and few of us do) to imagine that things might have been quite different if we had known enough to turn off that long road at some of the many turnings which now seem to have been practicable. Such judgments, however, are of the kind that Pericles had in mind, and whether they are wise we shall never know. When the actions now doubted were taken, they were the best we knew, and the most important thing about them is that the reasons which really moved us be clearly understood, so that those who are called upon in the future to act in like emergencies may see all the complex elements which enter into the formation and expression of the will of a great people. No future Secretary of State is going to be able to form his policy under the wisdom of twenty years after. I am perhaps no better satisfied than anyone else with the course the world has

taken since 1919, but I am wholly unconvinced that the world is any worse off because of the idealism with which an American President, sustained by an overwhelming public approval, endeavored to serve it.

The war ended eighteen years ago. While I was a member of the Wilson Cabinet, my preoccupation with questions of military organization, supply and policy so occupied my time that I had very little opportunity to consider diplomatic problems. When the war was over and I left Washington, I turned my face very resolutely toward the future and have not to this day reëxamined my personal files or attempted any reëxamination of the problems then disposed of. With that much background I tried to bring to the questions here discussed as detached a state of mind as possible, and while I knew and honored the men whose actions I have here discussed as the officials responsible for American policies, I know quite well that their place in history will not depend upon any prejudiced judgment I may form of their actions.

I have spent practically all the leisure of the last year examining this subject, attempting to read all that has been published by our State Department and by the foreign offices of other governments and much of the discussion of these subjects by scholars and publicists. Out of it all I have come with the clear conviction that the entry of the United States



into the World War was not in the least affected by munition makers or bankers, that the business interests of the country and the welfare of our people during the long struggle were a constant but, as it seems to me, a proper object of solicitude of the Government, but that nothing done in the protection or furtherance of these business interests affected the ultimate decision. I am convinced also that our entrance into the war was caused directly and solely by the German use of the submarine and that to the last President Wilson worked to keep America out of the war, not only for those reasons which would move any enlightened statesman who tried to save his country from such horrors, but also and primarily because of his conviction that a saving mission was a part of a providential plan for the world. That the President's hope was defeated presents itself to my mind as the surrender of a purpose cherished above all others, in response to a duty which the President felt to be inescapable. The whole point was that the national interests of the United States, the long-range view of the nation's position in the world of which it is a part, would not suffer the endurance of the ruthless taking of the lives of Americans engaged in occupations which they had both a legal and moral right to pursue.



## CHAPTER X

### CONCLUSION

**I**T may contribute to clearness for me to restate the conclusion at which I have arrived in this examination and in advance to anticipate criticisms of it of four kinds.

What I have written will not appeal to those whose thinking starts from the pacifist or communistic point of view. The pacifists regard all alleged causes of war as so essentially heretical that to pick out any one of them is a work of supererogation, while those who write from the communistic point of view regard no wars as justified, on any ground, except the class war which has as its object the seizure of power by the proletariat, in which any degree of violence regarded as helpful is justified. To those who have this approach the wars of the modern world are conclusively assumed to be the defensive antics of the capitalist system, and they are not patient of proof, however conclusive, that the activities and ambitions of bankers and other representatives of the property-owning class were not the determining factors.

Criticism from another point of view will arise in the minds of those generally known as economic determinists. Since the war, opinion of this sort has grown rapidly and it is held by men occupying

places of dignity and importance in the fields of scholarship in the social sciences. This school assumes an economic basis for all social phenomenon and rejects, even where it cannot disprove, the intervention of emotional influences and spiritual factors, which are regarded as manifestations of economic pressures. Much of what I have written will seem to such a modern materialist as either superficial or mystical, but I can make no other defense than to express my profound conviction that human events are not always motivated by economic considerations. We see on every hand personal and group passions which spring from traditional, racial, religious, and temperamental sources. Influences of this sort have not only been responsible for great events in human history, but they have frequently produced actions quite at variance with the obvious economic interest of those involved. Great leaders of men know this and have always known it, and their appeals have rarely, if ever, been to the economic advantage of actions which they desire their followers to take. Indeed, it may be said almost to be the characteristic of the kind of "inspiration," which has led men to deeds of individual or national heroism, that it involved the sacrifice of temporal and economic advantages for an ideal. Peter the Hermit preached the crusades not to sack the Holy City but to rescue the Holy Sepulchre. The negative of this thesis

seems equally true to me. When cautious and conservative leaders have sought to restrain an emotional uprising by pointing out the obvious economic advantage of acquiescence in some spiritual or intellectual tyranny, they have been swept aside by movements of masses who set a higher value upon abstract things, like civil or religious liberty or the rescue of oppressed peoples, than they did upon economic well-being. The most beneficent forms of despotism have been able, by plentiful bread and circuses, long to suppress the spirit of those who prefer to be poor if necessary, but in any case free.

The most pertinent criticism which I anticipate will come from those who feel that I have oversimplified the cause of America's entry into the World War and confused the occasion with the cause. This I may to some extent have done.

Certainly the occasion of the United States' entering the World War was the resumption of submarine warfare. The implications of that form of warfare and the atmosphere into which those implications were received seem to me to have been the cause. On an early page I have quoted from a letter written by Haniel, Counsellor of the German Embassy in Washington, to the German Headquarters. I repeat two sentences from it:

... No government and no party would venture, without committing political suicide, to give in to Ger-



many on this question, which is one involving the lives of American citizens, after America has so definitely announced what it considers its international rights. . . .

. . . Even the most zealous apostles of peace would not be able to endure the reproach that, by breaking off diplomatic relations, they had in a sense given Germany a license to kill all Americans in the future.

This realistic opinion states the case. The American Government, as a great neutral, endeavored for two and one-half years to maintain the rights of its citizens while the rest of the world was engaged in a war of such desperate severity that all rules were off among the belligerents, with respect to the rights of neutrals, if a recognition of those rights threatened the success and, therefore, the safety of the fighting nations involved. As a consequence, the United States was perilously near a war with Great Britain in 1916, although the likelihood is that, if forced to the choice, Great Britain would have yielded rather than fought with us under the circumstances. The situation made our disputes with the Allies center around rights of property, as to which there could be arbitration and compensation for wrong when quiet was restored. Our controversies with Germany, however, centered upon the problem of human life, as to which no compensation was possible. To yield here involved an ultimate interest of the United States. Thiers ruthlessly restored order in Paris, asserting, "The

first business of a government is to govern." Certainly the second business of a government is to protect the lives of its people. No government which conceded that some other government might kill its citizens in response to some exigency of its own, with no more serious consequence than a postponed attempt to secure a money compensation, would be intrinsically respectable or able to hold the confidence of its own people. The submarine warfare, therefore, presented the question to which there could be but one answer and about which there could be no delay. When the answer was given, it represented a composite expression of emotions which had been long brewing. Business interests, the "view of life," adherence to particular forms of civil liberty, dread of the consequences of the triumph of militarism, no doubt all made contributions. President Wilson himself expressed this when he said, "We are glad to fight for the ultimate peace of the world and the liberation of its peoples," a sentence which may be regarded as pure "idealism" and therefore held in low esteem. What has happened since 1918, however, has repeatedly demonstrated that Wilson's idealism was in fact a very far-seeing but stern realism. The present state of the world illustrates the importance of such considerations. We Americans at the present moment are looking with dread and disapproval at the menace of war which overhangs

Europe. It is no doubt quite irrational and upon a cold analysis could probably be shown to spring from an infinitely complex interplay of economic tensions, nationalistic aspirations, and racial and religious traditions. But there they are! They make up the modern world, and they are not disposed of by disapproving of them. For all practical purposes, nations have ultimate interests which they would rather fight for than surrender. Those interests may be wise or unwise, selfish or unselfish. In 1917 the United States had such an interest and it was untainted by any selfish consideration.





## APPENDIX

President Wilson's war message of April 2, 1917, and the three addresses to which he referred therein, are printed in the following pages.





## ADDRESS OF PRESIDENT WILSON TO THE SENATE, JANUARY 22, 1917<sup>1</sup>

### *The Bases of a Durable Peace*

ON the 18th of December last I addressed an identic note to the governments of the nations now at war requesting them to state, more definitely than they had yet been stated by either group of belligerents, the terms upon which they would deem it possible to make peace. I spoke on behalf of humanity and of the rights of all neutral nations like our own, many of whose most vital interests the war puts in constant jeopardy. The Central powers united in a reply which stated merely that they were ready to meet their antagonists in conference to discuss terms of peace. The Entente powers have replied much more definitely and have stated, in general terms, indeed, but with sufficient definiteness to imply details, the arrangements, guarantees, and acts of reparation which they deem to be the indispensable conditions of a satisfactory settlement. We are that much nearer a definite discussion of the peace which shall end the present war. We are that much nearer the discussion of the international concert which must thereafter hold the world at peace. In every discussion of the peace that must end this war it is taken for granted that that peace must be followed by some definite concert of power which will make it virtually impossible that any such catastrophe should ever overwhelm us again. Every lover of mankind, every sane and thoughtful man, must take that for granted.

I have sought this opportunity to address you because I thought that I owed it to you, as the council associated with me in the final determination of our international obligations, to disclose to you without reserve the thought and purpose that have been taking form in my mind in regard to the duty of our Government in the days to come when it will be necessary to

<sup>1</sup> Foreign Relations, 1917, Supplement I, p. 24-29.

lay afresh and upon a new plan the foundations of peace among the nations.

It is inconceivable that the people of the United States should play no part in that great enterprise. To take part in such a service will be the opportunity for which they have sought to prepare themselves by the very principles and purposes of their polity and the approved practices of their Government ever since the days when they set up a new nation in the high and honourable hope that it might in all that it was and did show mankind the way to liberty. They can not in honour withhold the service to which they are now about to be challenged. They do not wish to withhold it. But they owe it to themselves and to the other nations of the world to state the conditions under which they will feel free to render it.

That service is nothing less than this, to add their authority and their power to the authority and force of other nations to guarantee peace and justice throughout the world. Such a settlement cannot now be long postponed. It is right that before it comes this Government should frankly formulate the conditions upon which it would feel justified in asking our people to approve its formal and solemn adherence to a league for peace. I am here to attempt to state those conditions.

The present war must first be ended; but we owe it to candour and to a just regard for the opinion of mankind to say that, so far as our participation in guarantees of future peace is concerned, it makes a great deal of difference in what way and upon what terms it is ended. The treaties and agreements which bring it to an end must embody terms which will create a peace that is worth guaranteeing and preserving, a peace that will win the approval of mankind, not merely a peace that will serve the several interests and immediate aims of the nations engaged. We shall have no voice in determining what those terms shall be, but we shall, I feel sure, have a voice in determining whether they shall be made lasting or not by the guarantees of a universal covenant; and our judgment upon what is fundamental and essential as a condition precedent to permanency should be spoken now, not afterwards when it may be too late.



No covenant of cooperative peace that does not include the peoples of the New World can suffice to keep the future safe against war; and yet there is only one sort of peace that the peoples of America could join in guaranteeing. The elements of that peace must be elements that engage the confidence and satisfy the principles of the American governments, elements consistent with their political faith and with the practical convictions which the peoples of America have once for all embraced and undertaken to defend.

I do not mean to say that any American government would throw any obstacle in the way of any terms of peace the governments now at war might agree upon, or seek to upset them when made, whatever they might be. I only take it for granted that mere terms of peace between the belligerents will not satisfy even the belligerents themselves. Mere agreements may not make peace secure. It will be absolutely necessary that a force be created as a guarantor of the permanency of the settlement so much greater than the force of any nation now engaged or any alliance hitherto formed or projected that no nation, no probable combination of nations, could face or withstand it. If the peace presently to be made is to endure, it must be a peace made secure by the organized major force of mankind.

The terms of the immediate peace agreed upon will determine whether it is a peace for which such a guarantee can be secured. The question upon which the whole future peace and policy of the world depends is this: Is the present war a struggle for a just and secure peace, or only for a new balance of power? If it be only a struggle for a new balance of power, who will guarantee, who can guarantee, the stable equilibrium of the new arrangement? Only a tranquil Europe can be a stable Europe. There must be, not a balance of power, but a community of power; not organized rivalries, but an organized common peace.

Fortunately we have received very explicit assurances on this point. The statesmen of both of the groups of nations now arrayed against one another have said, in terms that could not be misinterpreted, that it was no part of the purpose they had in mind to crush their antagonists. But the implications of these



assurances may not be equally clear to all—may not be the same on both sides of the water. I think it will be serviceable if I attempt to set forth what we understand them to be.

They imply, first of all, that it must be a peace without victory. It is not pleasant to say this. I beg that I may be permitted to put my own interpretation upon it and that it may be understood that no other interpretation was in my thought. I am seeking only to face realities and to face them without soft concealments. Victory would mean peace forced upon the loser, a victor's terms imposed upon the vanquished. It would be accepted in humiliation, under duress, at an intolerable sacrifice, and would leave a sting, a resentment, a bitter memory upon which terms of peace would rest, not permanently, but only as upon quicksand. Only a peace between equals can last, only a peace the very principle of which is equality and a common participation in a common benefit. The right state of mind, the right feeling between nations, is as necessary for a lasting peace as is the just settlement of vexed questions of territory or of racial and national allegiance.

The equality of nations upon which peace must be founded if it is to last must be an equality of rights; the guarantees exchanged must neither recognize nor imply a difference between big nations and small, between those that are powerful and those that are weak. Right must be based upon the common strength, not upon the individual strength, of the nations upon whose concert peace will depend. Equality of territory or of resources there of course cannot be; nor any other sort of equality not gained in the ordinary peaceful and legitimate development of the peoples themselves. But no one asks or expects anything more than an equality of rights. Mankind is looking now for freedom of life, not for equipoises of power.

And there is a deeper thing involved than even equality of right among organized nations. No peace can last, or ought to last, which does not recognize and accept the principle that governments derive all their just powers from the consent of the governed, and that no right anywhere exists to hand peoples about from sovereignty to sovereignty as if they were property.

I take it for granted, for instance, if I may venture upon a single example, that statesmen everywhere are agreed that there should be a united, independent, and autonomous Poland, and that henceforth inviolable security of life, of worship, and of industrial and social development should be guaranteed to all peoples who have lived hitherto under the power of governments devoted to a faith and purpose hostile to their own.

I speak of this, not because of any desire to exalt an abstract political principle which has always been held very dear by those who have sought to build up liberty in America, but for the same reason that I have spoken of the other conditions of peace which seem to me clearly indispensable—because I wish frankly to uncover realities. Any peace which does not recognize and accept this principle will inevitably be upset. It will not rest upon the affections or the convictions of mankind. The ferment of spirit of whole populations will fight subtly and constantly against it, and all the world will sympathize. The world can be at peace only if its life is stable, and there can be no stability where the will is in rebellion, where there is not tranquility of spirit and a sense of justice, of freedom, and of right.

So far as practicable, moreover, every great people now struggling towards a full development of its resources and of its powers should be assured a direct outlet to the great highways of the sea. Where this can not be done by the cession of territory, it can no doubt be done by the neutralization of direct rights of way under the general guarantee which will assure the peace itself. With a right comity of arrangement no nation need be shut away from free access to the open paths of the world's commerce.

And the paths of the sea must alike in law and in fact be free. The freedom of the seas is the *sine qua non* of peace, equality and cooperation. No doubt a somewhat radical reconsideration of many of the rules of international practice hitherto thought to be established may be necessary in order to make the seas indeed free and common in practically all circumstances for the use of mankind, but the motive for such changes is convincing and compelling. There can be no trust or intimacy between the



peoples of the world without them. The free, constant, unthreatened intercourse of nations is an essential part of the process of peace and of development. It need not be difficult either to define or to secure the freedom of the seas if the governments of the world sincerely desire to come to an agreement concerning it.

It is a problem closely connected with the limitation of naval armaments and the cooperation of the navies of the world in keeping the seas at once free and safe, and the question of limiting naval armaments opens the wider and perhaps more difficult question of the limitation of armies and of all programmes of military preparation. Difficult and delicate as these questions are, they must be faced with the utmost candour and decided in a spirit of real accommodation if peace is to come with healing in its wings, and come to stay. Peace cannot be had without concession and sacrifice. There can be no sense of safety and equality among the nations if great preponderating armaments are henceforth to continue here and there to be built up and maintained. The statesmen of the world must plan for peace and nations must adjust and accommodate their policy to it as they have planned for war and made ready for pitiless contest and rivalry. The question of armaments, whether on land or sea, is the most immediately and intensely practical question connected with the future fortunes of nations and of mankind.

I have spoken upon these great matters without reserve and with the utmost explicitness because it has seemed to me to be necessary if the world's yearning desire for peace was anywhere to find free voice and utterance. Perhaps I am the only person in high authority amongst all the peoples of the world who is at liberty to speak and hold nothing back. I am speaking as an individual, and yet I am speaking also, of course, as the responsible head of a great government, and I feel confident that I have said what the people of the United States would wish me to say. May I not add that I hope and believe that I am in effect speaking for liberals and friends of humanity in every nation and of every programme of liberty? I would fain believe that I am speaking for the silent mass of mankind everywhere who have as yet had no place or opportunity to speak their real hearts out



concerning the death and ruin they see to have come already upon the persons and the homes they hold most dear.

And in holding out the expectation that the people and Government of the United States will join the other civilized nations of the world in guaranteeing the permanence of peace upon such terms as I have named I speak with the greater boldness and confidence because it is clear to every man who can think that there is in this promise no breach in either our traditions or our policy as a nation, but a fulfilment, rather, of all that we have professed or striven for.

I am proposing, as it were, that the nations should with one accord adopt the doctrine of President Monroe as the doctrine of the world: that no nation should seek to extend its polity over any other nation or people, but that every people should be left free to determine its own polity, its own way of development, unhindered, unthreatened, unafraid, the little along with the great and powerful.

I am proposing that all nations henceforth avoid entangling alliances which would draw them into competitions of power, catch them in a net of intrigue and selfish rivalry, and disturb their own affairs with influences intruded from without. There is no entangling alliance in a concert of power. When all unite to act in the same sense and with the same purpose, all act in the common interest and are free to live their own lives under a common protection.

I am proposing government by the consent of the governed; that freedom of the seas which in international conference after conference representatives of the United States have urged with the eloquence of those who are the convinced disciples of liberty; and that moderation of armaments which makes of armies and navies a power for order merely, not an instrument of aggression or of selfish violence.

These are American principles, American policies. We could stand for no others. And they are also the principles and policies of forward-looking men and women everywhere, of every modern nation, of every enlightened community. They are the principles of mankind and must prevail.

## ADDRESS OF PRESIDENT WILSON TO CONGRESS, FEBRUARY 3, 1917<sup>2</sup>

### *The Severance of Diplomatic Relations with Germany*

THE Imperial German Government on the 31st of January announced to this Government and to the governments of the other neutral nations that on and after the 1st day of February, the present month, it would adopt a policy with regard to the use of submarines against all shipping seeking to pass through certain designated areas of the high seas to which it is clearly my duty to call your attention.

Let me remind the Congress that on the 18th of April last, in view of the sinking on the 24th of March of the cross-channel passenger steamer *Sussex* by a German submarine, without summons or warning, and the consequent loss of the lives of several citizens of the United States who were passengers aboard her, this Government addressed a note to the Imperial German Government in which it made the following declaration:

If it is still the purpose of the Imperial Government to prosecute relentless and indiscriminate warfare against vessels of commerce by the use of submarines without regard to what the Government of the United States must consider the sacred and indisputable rules of international law and the universally recognized dictates of humanity, the Government of the United States is at last forced to the conclusion that there is but one course it can pursue. Unless the Imperial Government should now immediately declare and effect an abandonment of its present methods of submarine warfare against passenger and freight-carrying vessels, the Government of the United States can have no choice but to sever diplomatic relations with the German Empire altogether.

In reply to this declaration the Imperial German Government gave this Government the following assurance:

The German Government is prepared to do its utmost to confine the operations of war for the rest of its duration to the fighting forces

<sup>2</sup> Foreign Relations, 1917, Supplement I, p. 109-112.



of the belligerents, thereby also insuring the freedom of the seas, a principle upon which the German Government believes, now as before, to be in agreement with the Government of the United States.

The German Government, guided by this idea, notifies the Government of the United States that the German naval forces have received the following orders: In accordance with the general principles of visit and search and destruction of merchant vessels recognized by international law, such vessels, both within and without the area declared as naval war zone, shall not be sunk without warning and without saving human lives, unless these ships attempt to escape or offer resistance.

But (it added) neutrals can not expect that Germany, forced to fight for her existence, shall, for the sake of neutral interest, restrict the use of an effective weapon if her enemy is permitted to continue to apply at will methods of warfare violating the rules of international law. Such a demand would be incompatible with the character of neutrality, and the German Government is convinced that the Government of the United States does not think of making such a demand, knowing that the Government of the United States has repeatedly declared that it is determined to restore the principle of the freedom of the seas, from whatever quarter it has been violated.

To this the Government of the United States replied on the 8th of May, accepting, of course, the assurances given, but adding:

The Government of the United States feels it necessary to state that it takes it for granted that the Imperial German Government does not intend to imply that the maintenance of its newly announced policy is in any way contingent upon the course or result of diplomatic negotiations between the Government of the United States and any other belligerent government, notwithstanding the fact that certain passages in the Imperial Government's note of the 4th instant might appear to be susceptible of that construction. In order, however, to avoid any possible misunderstanding, the Government of the United States notifies the Imperial Government that it can not for a moment entertain, much less discuss, a suggestion that respect by German naval authorities for the rights of citizens of the United States upon the high seas should in any way or in the slightest degree be made contingent upon the conduct of any other government affecting the rights of neutrals and noncombatants. Responsibility in such matters is single, not joint; absolute, not relative.

To this note of the 8th of May the Imperial German Government made no reply.



On the 31st of January, the Wednesday of the present week, the German Ambassador handed to the Secretary of State, along with a formal note, a memorandum which contains the following statement:

The Imperial Government, therefore, does not doubt that the Government of the United States will understand the situation thus forced upon Germany by the Entente allies' brutal methods of war and by their determination to destroy the Central powers, and that the Government of the United States will further realize that the new openly disclosed intentions of the Entente allies give back to Germany the freedom of action which she reserved in her note addressed to the Government of the United States on May 4, 1916.

Under these circumstances Germany will meet the illegal measures of her enemies by forcibly preventing after February 1, 1917, in a zone around Great Britain, France, Italy, and in the Eastern Mediterranean all navigation, that of neutrals included, from and to England and from and to France, etc., etc. All ships met within the zone will be sunk.

I think that you will agree with me that, in view of this declaration, which suddenly and without prior intimation of any kind deliberately withdraws the solemn assurance given in the Imperial Government's note of the 4th of May, 1916, this Government has no alternative consistent with the dignity and honour of the United States but to take the course which, in its note of the 18th of April, 1916, it announced that it would take in the event that the German Government did not declare and effect an abandonment of the methods of submarine warfare which it was then employing and to which it now purposes again to resort.

I have, therefore, directed the Secretary of State to announce to his excellency the German Ambassador that all diplomatic relations between the United States and the German Empire are severed, and that the American Ambassador at Berlin will immediately be withdrawn; and, in accordance with this decision, to hand to his excellency his passports.

Notwithstanding this unexpected action of the German Government, this sudden and deeply deplorable renunciation of its assurances given this Government at one of the most critical

moments of tension in the relations of the two Governments, I refuse to believe that it is the intention of the German authorities to do in fact what they have warned us they will feel at liberty to do. I can not bring myself to believe that they will indeed pay no regard to the ancient friendship between their people and our own or to the solemn obligations which have been exchanged between them and destroy American ships and take the lives of American citizens in the wilful prosecution of the ruthless naval programme they have announced their intention to adopt. Only actual overt acts on their part can make me believe it even now.

If this inveterate confidence on my part in the sobriety and prudent foresight of their purpose should unhappily prove unfounded; if American ships and American lives should in fact be sacrificed by their naval commanders in heedless contravention of the just and reasonable understandings of international law and the obvious dictates of humanity, I shall take the liberty of coming again before the Congress, to ask that authority be given me to use any means that may be necessary for the protection of our seamen and our people in the prosecution of their peaceful and legitimate errands on the high seas. I can do nothing less. I take it for granted that all neutral governments will take the same course.

We do not desire any hostile conflict with the Imperial German Government. We are the sincere friends of the German people and earnestly desire to remain at peace with the Government which speaks for them. We shall not believe that they are hostile to us unless and until we are obliged to believe it; and we purpose nothing more than the reasonable defense of the undoubted rights of our people. We wish to serve no selfish ends. We seek merely to stand true alike in thought and in action to the immemorial principles of our people which I sought to express in my address to the Senate only two weeks ago—seek merely to vindicate our right to liberty and justice and an unmolested life. These are the bases of peace, not war. God grant we may not be challenged to defend them by acts of wilful injustice on the part of the Government of Germany!



## ADDRESS OF PRESIDENT WILSON TO CONGRESS, FEBRUARY 26, 1917<sup>8</sup>

### *The Armament of American Merchant Ships*

I HAVE again asked the privilege of addressing you because we are moving through critical times during which it seems to me to be my duty to keep in close touch with the Houses of Congress, so that neither counsel nor action shall run at cross purposes between us.

On the third of February I officially informed you of the sudden and unexpected action of the Imperial German Government in declaring its intention to disregard the promises it had made to this Government in April last and undertake immediate submarine operations against all commerce, whether of belligerents or of neutrals, that should seek to approach Great Britain and Ireland, the Atlantic coasts of Europe, or the harbors of the eastern Mediterranean, and to conduct those operations without regard to the established restrictions of international practice, without regard to any considerations of humanity even which might interfere with their object. That policy was forthwith put into practice. It has now been in active execution for nearly four weeks.

Its practical results are not yet fully disclosed. The commerce of other neutral nations is suffering severely, but not, perhaps, very much more severely than it was already suffering before the first of February, when the new policy of the Imperial Government was put into operation. We have asked the co-operation of the other neutral governments to prevent these depredations, but so far none of them has thought it wise to join us in any common course of action. Our own commerce has suffered, is suffering, rather in apprehension than in fact, rather because so many of our ships are timidly keeping to their home ports than because American ships have been sunk.

<sup>8</sup> Baker and Dodd, *The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson: The New Democracy*, v. 2, p. 428-432.



Two American vessels have been sunk, the *Housatonic* and the *Lyman M. Law*. The case of the *Housatonic*, which was carrying foodstuffs consigned to a London firm, was essentially like the case of the *Fry*, in which, it will be recalled, the German Government admitted its liability for damages, and the lives of the crew, as in the case of the *Fry*, were safeguarded with reasonable care. The case of the *Law*, which was carrying lemon-box staves to Palermo, disclosed a ruthlessness of method which deserves grave condemnation, but was accompanied by no circumstances which might not have been expected at any time in connection with the use of the submarine against merchantmen as the German Government has used it.

In sum, therefore, the situation we find ourselves in with regard to the actual conduct of the German submarine warfare against commerce and its effects upon our own ships and people is substantially the same that it was when I addressed you on the third of February, except for the tying up of our shipping in our own ports because of the unwillingness of our shipowners to risk their vessels at sea without insurance or adequate protection, and the very serious congestion of our commerce which has resulted, a congestion which is growing rapidly more and more serious every day. This in itself might presently accomplish, in effect, what the new German submarine orders were meant to accomplish, so far as we are concerned. We can only say, therefore, that the overt act which I have ventured to hope the German commanders would in fact avoid has not occurred.

But, while this is happily true, it must be admitted that there have been certain additional indications and expressions of purpose on the part of the German press and the German authorities which have increased rather than lessened the impression that, if our ships and our people are spared, it will be because of fortunate circumstances or because the commanders of the German submarines which they may happen to encounter exercise an unexpected discretion and restraint rather than because of the instructions under which those commanders are acting. It would be foolish to deny that the situation is fraught with the gravest possibilities and dangers. No thoughtful man can fail to see that

the necessity for definite action may come at any time, if we are in fact, and not in word merely, to defend our elementary rights as a neutral nation. It would be most imprudent to be unprepared.

I cannot in such circumstances be unmindful of the fact that the expiration of the term of the present Congress is immediately at hand, by constitutional limitation; and that it would in all likelihood require an unusual length of time to assemble and organize the Congress which is to succeed it. I feel that I ought, in view of that fact, to obtain from you full and immediate assurance of the authority which I may need at any moment to exercise. No doubt I already possess that authority without special warrant of law, by the plain implication of my constitutional duties and powers; but I prefer, in the present circumstances, not to act upon general implication. I wish to feel that the authority and the power of the Congress are behind me in whatever it may become necessary for me to do. We are jointly the servants of the people and must act together and in their spirit, so far as we can divine and interpret it.

No one doubts what it is our duty to do. We must defend our commerce and the lives of our people in the midst of the present trying circumstances, with discretion but with clear and steadfast purpose. Only the method and the extent remain to be chosen, upon the occasion, if occasion should indeed arise. Since it has unhappily proved impossible to safeguard our neutral rights by diplomatic means against the unwarranted infringements they are suffering at the hands of Germany, there may be no recourse but to *armed* neutrality, which we shall know how to maintain and for which there is abundant American precedent.

It is devoutly to be hoped that it will not be necessary to put armed force anywhere into action. The American people do not desire it, and our desire is not different from theirs. I am sure that they will understand the spirit in which I am now acting, the purpose I hold nearest my heart and would wish to exhibit in everything I do. I am anxious that the people of the nations at war also should understand and not mistrust us. I hope that I need give no further proofs and assurances than I have already



given throughout nearly three years of anxious patience that I am the friend of peace and mean to preserve it for America so long as I am able. I am not now proposing or contemplating war or any steps that need lead to it. I merely request that you will accord me by your own vote and definite bestowal the means and the authority to safeguard in practice the right of a great people who are at peace and who are desirous of exercising none but the rights of peace to follow the pursuits of peace in quietness and good will—rights recognized time out of mind by all the civilized nations of the world. No course of my choosing or of theirs will lead to war. War can come only by the wilful acts and aggressions of others.

You will understand why I can make no definite proposals or forecasts of action now and must ask for your supporting authority in the most general terms. The form in which action may become necessary cannot yet be foreseen. I believe that the people will be willing to trust me to act with restraint, with prudence, and in the true spirit of amity and good faith that they have themselves displayed throughout these trying months; and it is in that belief that I request that you will authorize me to supply our merchant ships with defensive arms, should that become necessary, and with the means of using them, and to employ any other instrumentalities or methods that may be necessary and adequate to protect our ships and our people in their legitimate and peaceful pursuits on the seas. I request also that you will grant me at the same time, along with the powers I ask, a sufficient credit to enable me to provide adequate means of protection where they are lacking, including adequate insurance against the present war risks.

I have spoken of our commerce and of the legitimate errands of our people on the seas, but you will not be misled as to my main thought, the thought that lies beneath these phrases and gives them dignity and weight. It is not of material interests merely that we are thinking. It is, rather, of fundamental human rights, chief of all the right of life itself. I am thinking, not only of the rights of Americans to go and come about their proper business by way of the sea, but also of something much



deeper, much more fundamental than that. I am thinking of those rights of humanity without which there is no civilization. My theme is of those great principles of compassion and of protection which mankind has sought to throw about human lives, the lives of non-combatants, the lives of men who are peacefully at work keeping the industrial processes of the world quick and vital, the lives of women and children and of those who supply the labour which ministers to their sustenance. We are speaking of no selfish material rights but of rights which our hearts support and whose foundation is that righteous passion for justice upon which all law, all structures alike of family, of state, and of mankind must rest, as upon the ultimate base of our existence and our liberty. I cannot imagine any man with American principles at his heart hesitating to defend these things.

## ADDRESS OF PRESIDENT WILSON TO CONGRESS, APRIL 2, 1917 <sup>4</sup>

### *The "War Message"*

I HAVE called the Congress into extraordinary session because there are serious, very serious, choices of policy to be made, and made immediately, which it was neither right nor constitutionally permissible that I should assume the responsibility of making.

On the 3d of February last I officially laid before you the extraordinary announcement of the Imperial German Government that on and after the 1st day of February it was its purpose to put aside all restraints of law or of humanity and use its submarines to sink every vessel that sought to approach either the ports of Great Britain and Ireland or the western coasts of Europe or any of the ports controlled by the enemies of Germany within the Mediterranean. That had seemed to be the object of the German submarine warfare earlier in the war, but since April of last year the Imperial Government had somewhat restrained the commanders of its undersea craft in conformity with its promise then given to us that passenger boats should not be sunk and that due warning would be given to all other vessels which its submarines might seek to destroy, when no resistance was offered or escape attempted, and care taken that their crews were given at least a fair chance to save their lives in their open boats. The precautions taken were meagre and haphazard enough, as was proved in distressing instance after instance in the progress of the cruel and unmanly business, but a certain degree of restraint was observed. The new policy has swept every restriction aside. Vessels of every kind, whatever their flag, their character, their cargo, their destination, their errand, have been ruthlessly sent to the bottom without warning and without thought of help or mercy for those on board, the vessels of friendly neutrals along with those of belligerents. Even hos-

<sup>4</sup> Foreign Relations, 1917, Supplement I, p. 195-203.

pital ships and ships carrying relief to the sorely bereaved and stricken people of Belgium, though the latter were provided with safe-conduct through the proscribed areas by the German Government itself and were distinguished by unmistakable marks of identity, have been sunk with the same reckless lack of compassion or of principle.

I was for a little while unable to believe that such things would in fact be done by any government that had hitherto subscribed to the humane practices of civilized nations. International law had its origin in the attempt to set up some law which would be respected and observed upon the seas, where no nation had right of dominion and where lay the free highways of the world. By painful stage after stage has that law been built up, with meagre enough results, indeed, after all was accomplished that could be accomplished, but always with a clear view, at least, of what the heart and conscience of mankind demanded. This minimum of right the German Government has swept aside under the plea of retaliation and necessity and because it had no weapons which it could use at sea except these which it is impossible to employ as it is employing them without throwing to the winds all scruples of humanity or of respect for the understandings that were supposed to underlie the intercourse of the world. I am not now thinking of the loss of property involved, immense and serious as that is, but only of the wanton and wholesale destruction of the lives of noncombatants, men, women, and children, engaged in pursuits which have always, even in the darkest periods of modern history, been deemed innocent and legitimate. Property can be paid for; the lives of peaceful and innocent people can not be. The present German submarine warfare against commerce is a warfare against mankind.

It is a war against all nations. American ships have been sunk, American lives taken, in ways which it has stirred us very deeply to learn of, but the ships and people of other neutral and friendly nations have been sunk and overwhelmed in the waters in the same way. There has been no discrimination. The challenge is to all mankind. Each nation must decide for itself how it will meet



it. The choice we make for ourselves must be made with a moderation of counsel and a temperateness of judgment befitting our character and our motives as a nation. We must put excited feeling away. Our motive will not be revenge or the victorious assertion of the physical might of the nation, but only the vindication of right, of human right, of which we are only a single champion.

When I addressed the Congress on the 26th of February last, I thought that it would suffice to assert our neutral rights with arms, our right to use the seas against unlawful interference, our right to keep our people safe against unlawful violence. But armed neutrality, it now appears, is impracticable. Because submarines are in effect outlaws when used as the German submarines have been used against merchant shipping, it is impossible to defend ships against their attacks as the law of nations has assumed that merchantmen would defend themselves against privateers or cruisers, visible craft giving chase upon the open sea. It is common prudence in such circumstances, grim necessity indeed, to endeavour to destroy them before they have shown their own intention. They must be dealt with upon sight, if dealt with at all. The German Government denies the right of neutrals to use arms at all within the areas of the sea which it has proscribed, even in the defense of rights which no modern publicist has ever before questioned their right to defend. The intimation is conveyed that the armed guards which we have placed on our merchant ships will be treated as beyond the pale of law and subject to be dealt with as pirates would be. Armed neutrality is ineffectual enough at best; in such circumstances and in the face of such pretensions it is worse than ineffectual; it is likely only to produce what it was meant to prevent; it is practically certain to draw us into the war without either the rights or the effectiveness of belligerents. There is one choice we can not make, we are incapable of making: we will not choose the path of submission and suffer the most sacred rights of our nation and our people to be ignored or violated. The wrongs against which we now array ourselves are no common wrongs; they cut to the very roots of human life.

With a profound sense of the solemn and even tragical character of the step I am taking and of the grave responsibilities which it involves, but in unhesitating obedience to what I deem my constitutional duty, I advise that the Congress declare the recent course of the Imperial German Government to be in fact nothing less than war against the Government and people of the United States; that it formally accept the status of belligerent which has thus been thrust upon it; and that it take immediate steps not only to put the country in a more thorough state of defense but also to exert all its power and employ all its resources to bring the Government of the German Empire to terms and end the war.

What this will involve is clear. It will involve the utmost practicable cooperation in counsel and action with the governments now at war with Germany, and, as incident to that, the extension to those governments of the most liberal financial credits, in order that our resources may so far as possible be added to theirs. It will involve the organization and mobilization of all the material resources of the country to supply the materials of war and serve the incidental needs of the nation in the most abundant and yet the most economical and efficient way possible. It will involve the immediate full equipment of the Navy in all respects but particularly in supplying it with the best means of dealing with the enemy's submarines. It will involve the immediate addition to the armed forces of the United States already provided for by law in case of war at least 500,000 men, who should, in my opinion, be chosen upon the principle of universal liability to service, and also the authorization of subsequent additional increments of equal force so soon as they may be needed and can be handled in training. It will involve also, of course, the granting of adequate credits to the Government, sustained, I hope, so far as they can equitably be sustained by the present generation, by well conceived taxation.

I say sustained so far as may be equitable by taxation because it seems to me that it would be most unwise to base the credits which will now be necessary entirely on money borrowed. It is



our duty, I most respectfully urge, to protect our people so far as we may against the very serious hardships and evils which would be likely to arise out of the inflation which would be produced by vast loans.

In carrying out the measures by which these things are to be accomplished we should keep constantly in mind the wisdom of interfering as little as possible in our own preparation and in the equipment of our own military forces with the duty—for it will be a very practical duty—of supplying the nations already at war with Germany with the materials which they can obtain only from us or by our assistance. They are in the field and we should help them in every way to be effective there.

I shall take the liberty of suggesting, through the several executive departments of the Government, for the consideration of your committees, measures for the accomplishment of the several objects I have mentioned. I hope that it will be your pleasure to deal with them as having been framed after very careful thought by the branch of the Government upon which the responsibility of conducting the war and safeguarding the nation will most directly fall.

While we do these things, these deeply momentous things, let us be very clear, and make very clear to all the world what our motives and our objects are. My own thought has not been driven from its habitual and normal course by the unhappy events of the last two months, and I do not believe that the thought of the nation has been altered or clouded by them. I have exactly the same things in mind now that I had in mind when I addressed the Senate on the 22d of January last; the same that I had in mind when I addressed the Congress on the 3d of February and on the 26th of February. Our object now, as then, is to vindicate the principles of peace and justice in the life of the world as against selfish and autocratic power and to set up amongst the really free and self-governed peoples of the world such a concert of purpose and of action as will henceforth ensure the observance of those principles. Neutrality is no longer feasible or desirable where the peace of the world is involved and the freedom of its peoples, and the menace to that



peace and freedom lies in the existence of autocratic governments backed by organized force which is controlled wholly by their will, not by the will of their people. We have seen the last of neutrality in such circumstances. We are at the beginning of an age in which it will be insisted that the same standards of conduct and of responsibility for wrong done shall be observed among nations and their governments that are observed among the individual citizens of civilized states.

We have no quarrel with the German people. We have no feeling towards them but one of sympathy and friendship. It was not upon their impulse that their Government acted in entering this war. It was not with their previous knowledge or approval. It was a war determined upon as wars used to be determined upon in the old, unhappy days when peoples were nowhere consulted by their rulers and wars were provoked and waged in the interest of dynasties or of little groups of ambitious men who were accustomed to use their fellow men as pawns and tools. Self-governed nations do not fill their neighbour states with spies or set the course of intrigue to bring about some critical posture of affairs which will give them an opportunity to strike and make conquest. Such designs can be successfully worked out only under cover and where no one has the right to ask questions. Cunningly contrived plans of deception or aggression, carried, it may be, from generation to generation, can be worked out and kept from the light only within the privacy of courts or behind the carefully guarded confidences of a narrow and privileged class. They are happily impossible where public opinion commands and insists upon full information concerning all the nation's affairs.

A steadfast concert for peace can never be maintained except by a partnership of democratic nations. No autocratic government could be trusted to keep faith within it or observe its covenants. It must be a league of honour, a partnership of opinion. Intrigue would eat its vitals away; the plottings of inner circles who could plan what they would and render account to no one would be a corruption seated at its very heart. Only free peoples can hold their purpose and their honour steady to a common end

and prefer the interests of mankind to any narrow interest of their own.

Does not every American feel that assurance has been added to our hope for the future peace of the world by the wonderful and heartening things that have been happening within the last few weeks in Russia? Russia was known by those who knew it best to have been always in fact democratic at heart, in all the vital habits of her thought, in all the intimate relationships of her people that spoke their natural instinct, their habitual attitude towards life. The autocracy that crowned the summit of her political structure, long as it had stood and terrible as was the reality of its power, was not in fact Russian in origin, character, or purpose; and now it has been shaken off and the great, generous Russian people have been added in all their naïve majesty and might to the forces that are fighting for freedom in the world, for justice, and for peace. Here is a fit partner for a league of honour.

One of the things that has served to convince us that the Prussian autocracy was not and could never be our friend is that from the very outset of the present war it has filled our unsuspecting communities and even our offices of government with spies and set criminal intrigues everywhere afoot against our national unity of counsel, our peace within and without, our industries and our commerce. Indeed it is now evident that its spies were here even before the war began; and it is unhappily not a matter of conjecture but a fact proved in our courts of justice that the intrigues which have more than once come perilously near to disturbing the peace and dislocating the industries of the country have been carried on at the instigation, with the support, and even under the personal direction of official agents of the Imperial Government accredited to the Government of the United States. Even in checking these things and trying to extirpate them we have sought to put the most generous interpretation possible upon them because we knew that their source lay, not in any hostile feeling or purpose of the German people towards us (who were, no doubt, as ignorant of them as we ourselves were), but only in the selfish designs of a Government



that did what it pleased and told its people nothing. But they have played their part in serving to convince us at last that that Government entertains no real friendship for us and means to act against our peace and security at its convenience. That it means to stir up enemies against us at our very doors the intercepted note to the German Minister at Mexico City is eloquent evidence.

We are accepting this challenge of hostile purpose because we know that in such a government, following such methods, we can never have a friend; and that in the presence of its organized power, always lying in wait to accomplish we know not what purpose, there can be no assured security for the democratic governments of the world. We are now about to accept gage of battle with this natural foe to liberty and shall, if necessary, spend the whole force of the nation to check and nullify its pretensions and its power. We are glad, now that we see the facts with no veil of false pretence about them, to fight thus for the ultimate peace of the world and for the liberation of its peoples, the German peoples included: for the rights of nations great and small and the privilege of men everywhere to choose their way of life and of obedience. The world must be made safe for democracy. Its peace must be planted upon the tested foundations of political liberty. We have no selfish ends to serve. We desire no conquest, no dominion. We seek no indemnities for ourselves, no material compensation for the sacrifices we shall freely make. We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind. We shall be satisfied when those rights have been made as secure as the faith and the freedom of nations can make them.

Just because we fight without rancour and without selfish object, seeking nothing for ourselves but what we shall wish to share with all free peoples, we shall, I feel confident, conduct our operations as belligerents without passion and ourselves observe with proud punctilio the principles of right and of fair play we profess to be fighting for.

I have said nothing of the governments allied with the Imperial Government of Germany because they have not made war



upon us or challenged us to defend our right and our honour. The Austro-Hungarian Government has, indeed, avowed its unqualified endorsement and acceptance of the reckless and lawless submarine warfare adopted now without disguise by the Imperial German Government, and it has therefore not been possible for this Government to receive Count Tarnowski, the Ambassador recently accredited to this Government by the Imperial and Royal Government of Austria-Hungary; but that Government has not actually engaged in warfare against citizens of the United States on the seas, and I take the liberty, for the present at least, of postponing a discussion of our relations with the authorities at Vienna. We enter this war only where we are clearly forced into it because there are no other means of defending our rights.

It will be all the easier for us to conduct ourselves as belligerents in a high spirit of right and fairness because we act without animus, not in enmity towards a people or with the desire to bring any injury or disadvantage upon them, but only in armed opposition to an irresponsible government which has thrown aside all considerations of humanity and of right and is running amuck. We are, let me say again, the sincere friends of the German people, and shall desire nothing so much as the early reestablishment of intimate relations of mutual advantage between us—however hard it may be for them, for the time being, to believe that this is spoken from our hearts. We have borne with their present government through all these bitter months because of that friendship—exercising a patience and forbearance which would otherwise have been impossible. We shall, happily, still have an opportunity to prove that friendship in our daily attitude and actions towards the millions of men and women of German birth and native sympathy who live amongst us and share our life, and we shall be proud to prove it towards all who are in fact loyal to their neighbours and to the Government in the hour of test. They are, most of them, as true and loyal Americans as if they had never known any other fealty or allegiance. They will be prompt to stand with us in rebuking and restraining the few who may be of a different mind and purpose.

If there should be disloyalty, it will be dealt with with a firm hand of stern repression; but, if it lifts its head at all, it will lift it only here and there and without countenance except from a lawless and malignant few.

It is a distressing and oppressive duty, gentlemen of the Congress, which I have performed in thus addressing you. There are, it may be, many months of fiery trial and sacrifice ahead of us. It is a fearful thing to lead this great peaceful people into war, into the most terrible and disastrous of all wars, civilization itself seeming to be in the balance. But the right is more precious than peace, and we shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts—for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own governments, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal dominion of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world itself at last free. To such a task we can dedicate our lives and our fortunes, everything that we are and everything that we have, with the pride of those who know that the day has come when America is privileged to spend her blood and her might for the principles that gave her birth and happiness and the peace which she has treasured. God helping her, she can do no other.

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